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THE CLEVER DANCER



A STORY FROM
THE KATHA-SARITSAGARA

R. S. UMASHANKAR



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THE CLEVER DANCER

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narrates the adventures of Muladeva of
Ujjayini, when he visits Pataliputra and is
amazed at the wisdom of the people. His
meeting with a certain young woman leads to
a long-drawn battle of wits.

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THE CLEVER DANCER



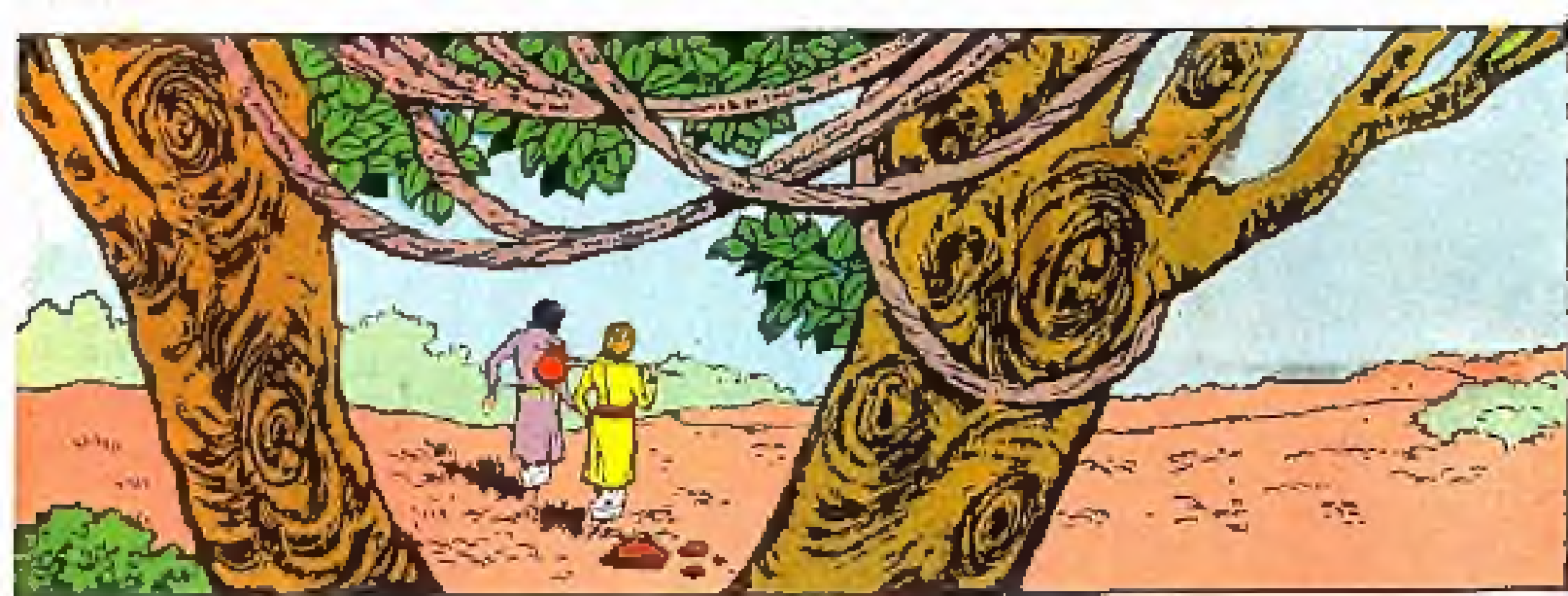
MULADEVA WAS A YOUNG BRAHMIN OF UJJAINI. HE WAS A MAN OF GREAT KNOWLEDGE AND INGENUITY. HE DEFEATED PUNDITS AND SCHOLARS IN DEBATES UPON THE SCRIPTURES, AND WAS CONSIDERED AN AUTHORITY ON THE VEDAS.

MULADEVA HAD A CLOSE FRIEND CALLED GHAGHI. ONE DAY GHAGHI CAME TO MULADEVA WITH A SUGGESTION.

YOU ARE A MASTER IN THE ART OF ORATORY AND YOUR FAME HAS TRAVELLED FAR AND WIDE. WHY NOT GO TO PATALIPUTRA AND EARN GREATER GLORY ?

A FINE SUGGESTION, FRIEND, AND I CAN TEST MY METTLE IN THAT HOME OF POLISHED WIT AND REFINEMENT.





ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF THE GREAT CITY, THEY SAW A WOMAN WASHING CLOTHES.



LET US ASK HER
IF SHE KNOWS OF SOME
PLACE WHERE
WE CAN STAY.

THAT IS
OUR FIRST AND
FOREMOST NEED.



THEY APPROACHED THE WOMAN.

GOOD LADY,
WHERE DO
TRAVELLERS FIND
LODGING ?

I KNOW THAT
DUCKS NEST ON
THE RIVER BANKS,
FISH IN THE WATER,
BEES IN LOTUSES,
BUT I HAVEN'T THE
FAINTEST IDEA
WHERE TRAVELLERS
STAY !

MULADEVA AND SHASHI WERE DUMBOUNDED.

WHAT DO WE DO NOW?

JUST WALK INTO THE CITY, FRIEND.

THEY HAD HARDLY GONE A FEW YARDS, WHEN THEY FOUND A BOY CRYING AT THE DOOR OF A HOUSE, WITH A PLATE OF WARM RICE-PUDDING IN FRONT OF HIM.

ONLY A FOOLISH CHILD WEEPS WHEN SUCH DELICIOUS HOT FOOD IS BEFORE HIM.

I AGREE.

THE LITTLE BOY BURST OUT LAUGHING.

ONLY FOOLS WILL NOT UNDERSTAND WHY I CRY. I HAVE TO WAIT FOR THE PUDDING TO COOL BEFORE I CAN EAT IT, BY CRYING, MY THROAT IS CLEARED AND MY LUNGS GET EXERCISE. BUT COUNTRY BUMPKINS LIKE YOU CANNOT UNDERSTAND ALL THIS!

THE FRIENDS WERE SHOCKED AT HIS LANGUAGE.

SUCH WORDS FROM THE MOUTH OF A LITTLE BOY!

WHAT A PRECOCIOUS CHILD!

AS THEY WERE CROSSING A FOREST—



GIVE US
SOME MANGOES,
FAIR ONE.

HOT OR
COLD ?

THE FRIENDS EXCHANGED GLANCES.



ANSWER
THAT,
MULADEVA.

MULADEVA WAS READY WITH HIS REPLY.



SOME
WARM ONES
FIRST.

SHE THREW DOWN SOME MANGOES.



MULADEVA AND SHASHI PICKED UP THE FRUIT, AND BLEW THE DUST OFF THEM.



AFTER THEY HAD EATEN THOSE MANGOES —

WERE THEY TOO WARM? I NOTICED YOU BLEW ON THEM. THEY ARE QUITE COOL — YOU CAN SAVE YOUR BREATH.



BY NOW MULADEVA,
THE GREAT WIT, WAS
FEELING HUMBLLED,
EVEN ASHAMED.

SHE IS THE
WITTIEST
CREATURE I'VE
MET. I'LL GET
THIS CLEVER
GIRL FOR A WIFE
AND TEACH
HER A
LESSON
OR TWO.



SHASHI, WE
MUST FIND OUT
WHERE SHE
LIVES.



THAT EVENING...

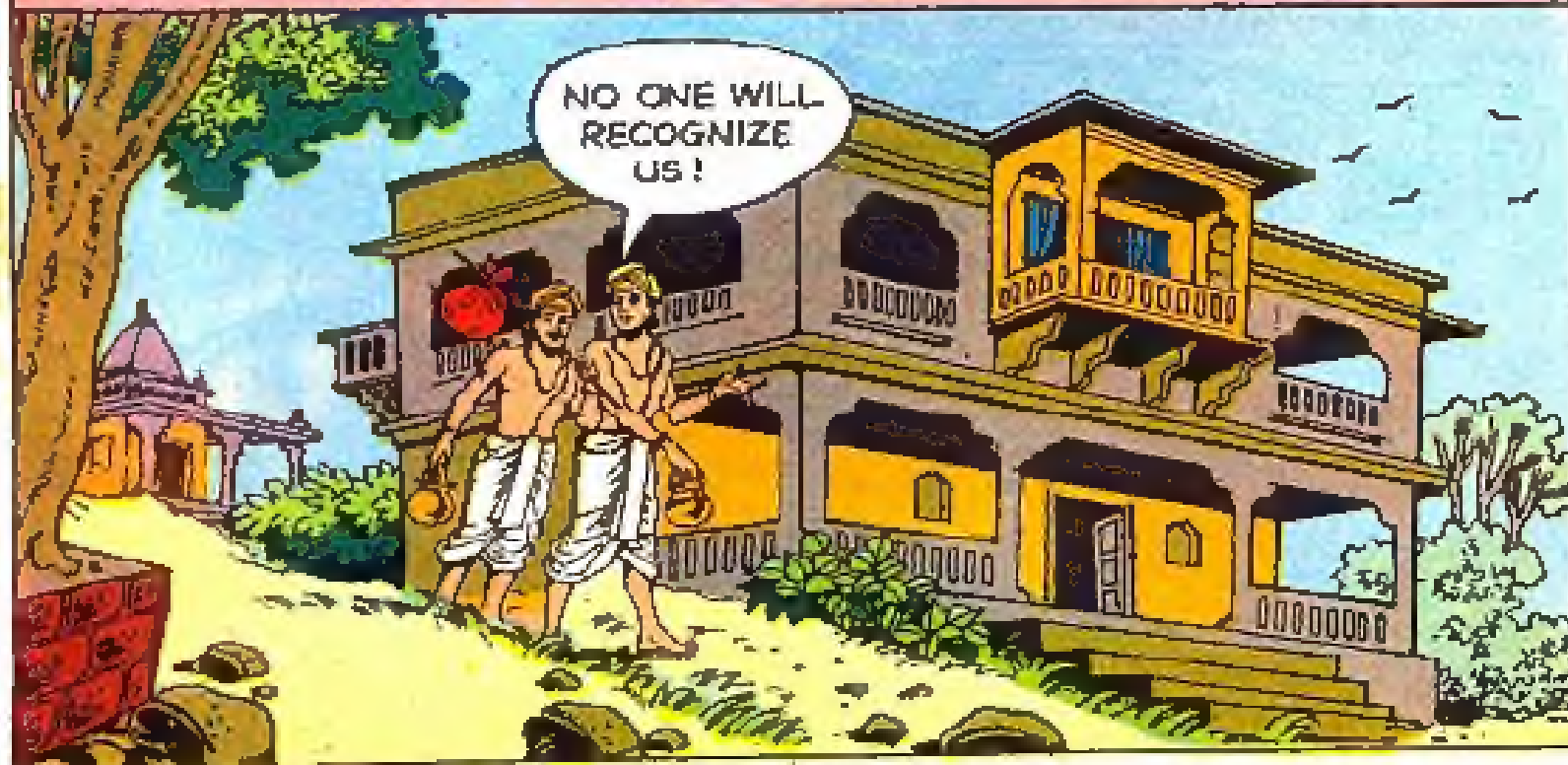
MULADEVA, SHE
IS THE DAUGHTER
OF A RICH
BRAHMIN NAMED
YAJNASWAMI.

WE
MUST ACT
PROMPTLY.



THE FOLLOWING DAY, MULADEVA AND SHASHI DISGUISED THEMSELVES AS
HUMBLE BRAHMINS AND STARTED OFF FOR YAJNASWAMI'S HOUSE.

NO ONE WILL
RECOGNIZE
US!



MULADEVA AND SHASHI FELT BOLD ENOUGH TO BARGAIN.

NOBLE SIR, WE CAN STAY WITH YOU ONLY ON ONE CONDITION. AFTER THE END OF FOUR MONTHS, YOU MUST GIVE US WHATEVER WE ASK FOR.

CERTAINLY, I WILL GIFT YOU ANYTHING THAT IS IN MY POWER TO GIVE.

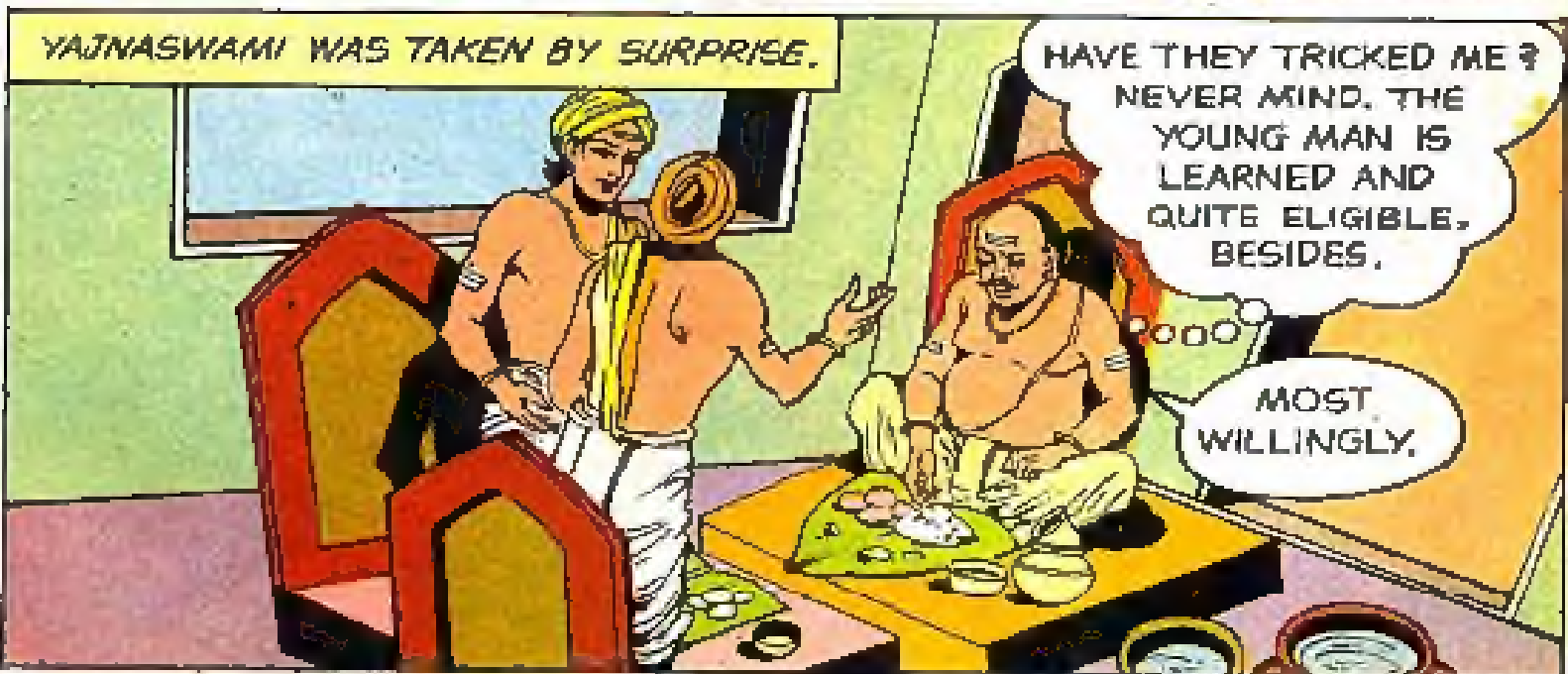
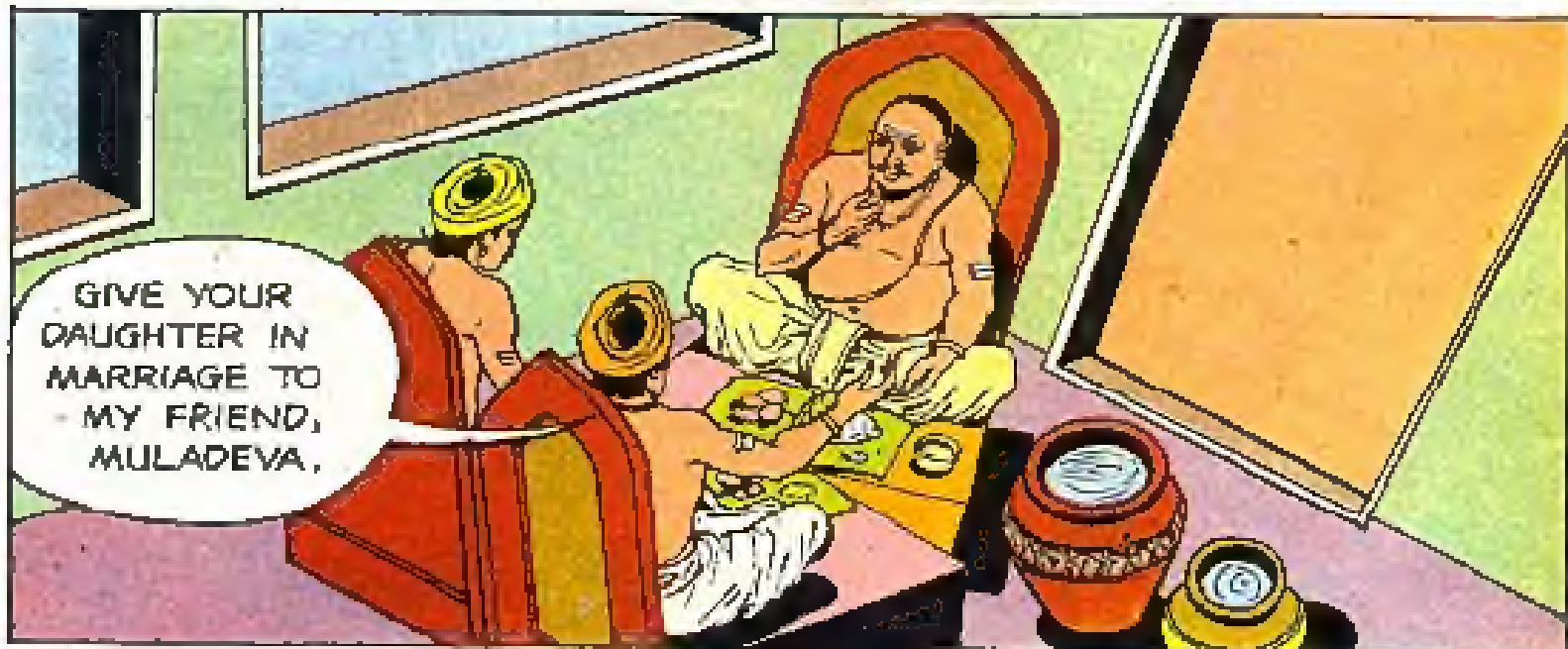
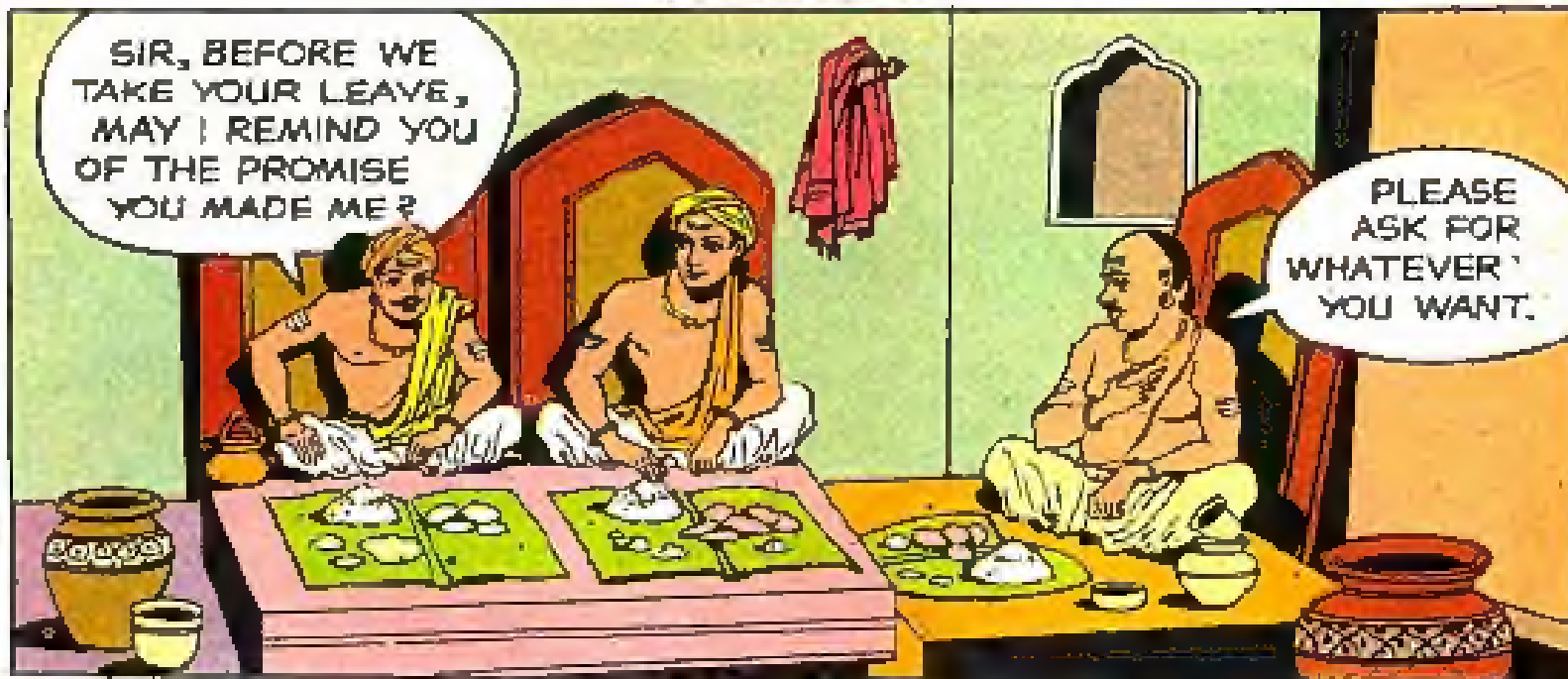
MULADEVA AND SHASHI LIVED IN YAJNASWAMI'S HOUSE. THEY ENCOUNTERED YAJNASWAMI'S DAUGHTER A NUMBER OF TIMES BUT SHE DID NOT RECOGNISE THEM IN THEIR DISGUISE.

AS INNOCENT AS A FLOWER! BUT I CAN'T FORGET THAT SHE HAD THE BETTER OF ME!

AT THE END OF FOUR MONTHS -

WE THANK YOU FOR YOUR KIND HOSPITALITY.

IT WAS A PLEASURE TO HAVE SUCH STIMULATING COMPANY.



A. SAKSHI'S DREAMT AND MULAKHA WERE MADE TO



ALONE IN THE BRIDAL
CHAMBER -



DO YOU REMEMBER
ME? THOSE WARM
AND COOL MANGES.

SHE BROKE INTO A SMILE.

COUNTRY BUMPKINS
ARE TOO SLOW
FOR CITY WITS



I, THE COUNTRY
BUMPKIN, AM ABOUT
TO, DESERT YOU AND
GO FAR AWAY AND
YOU, THE CITY WIT,
WILL STAY HERE
AND FRET!

MULADEVA'S WIFE SHOWED NO SIGN OF ALARM OR FEAR BUT INSTEAD, THREW HER HUSBAND A CHALLENGE.

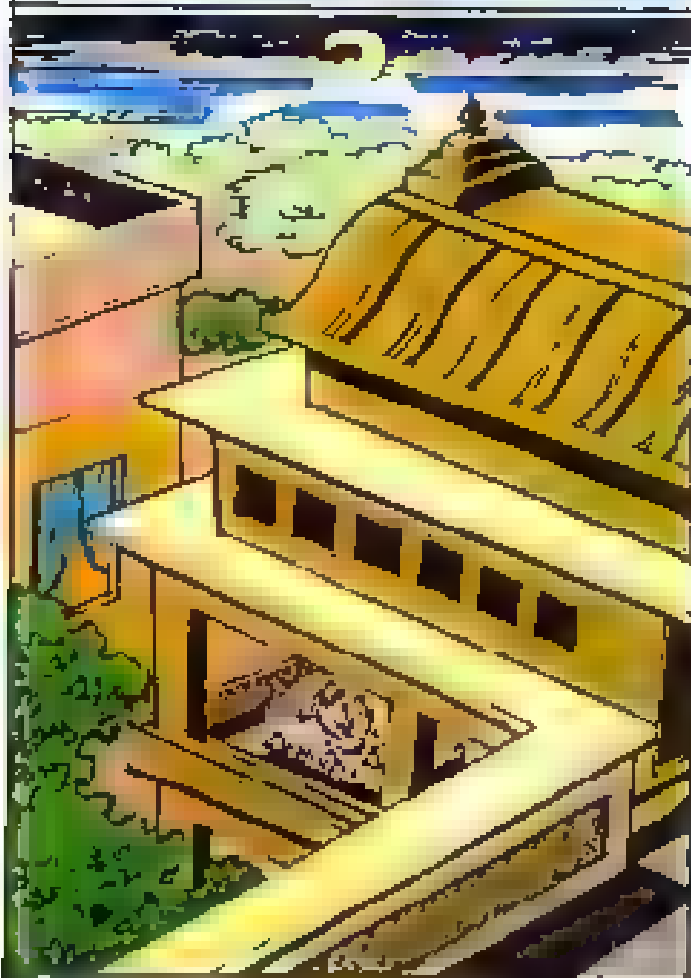
YOU WILL COME BACK TO ME AS FATHER OF MY SON!

DEAR EXPERT AT REPARTEE AND RIDDLE, LET US SEE HOW YOU DO THAT

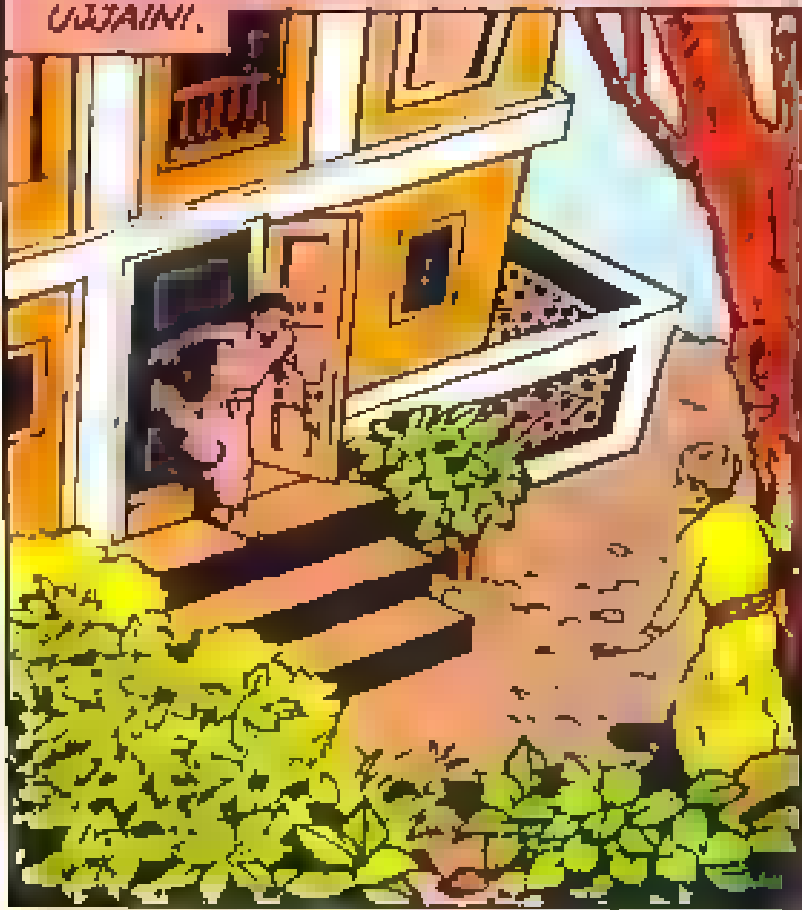
AFTER THESE EXCHANGES, THE TIRED PAIR WENT TO SLEEP.

IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT, MULADEVA GOT UP.

I SHALL SLIP THIS RING ON TO HER FINGER BEFORE I LEAVE HER

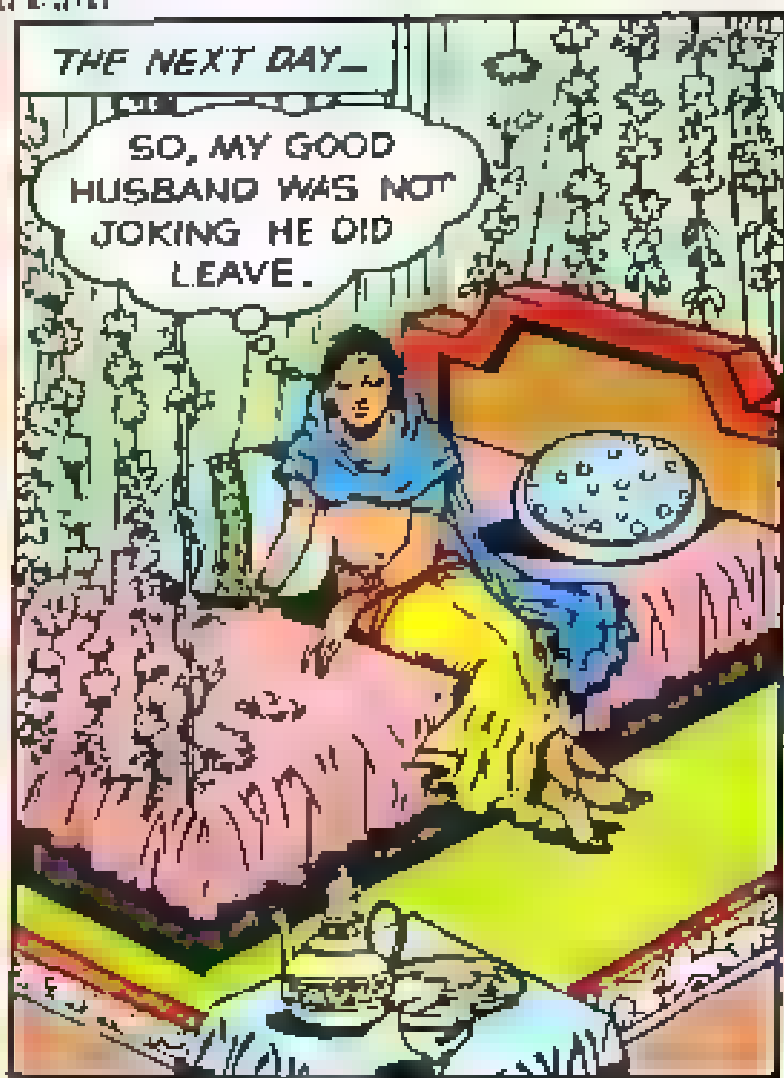


MULADEVA MET SHASHI OUTSIDE
THE HOUSE AS PLANNED AND
TOGETHER THEY LEFT FOR
UJJAINI.



THE NEXT DAY...

SO, MY GOOD
HUSBAND WAS NOT
JOKING HE DID
LEAVE.



SEEING THE RING ON HER FINGER -

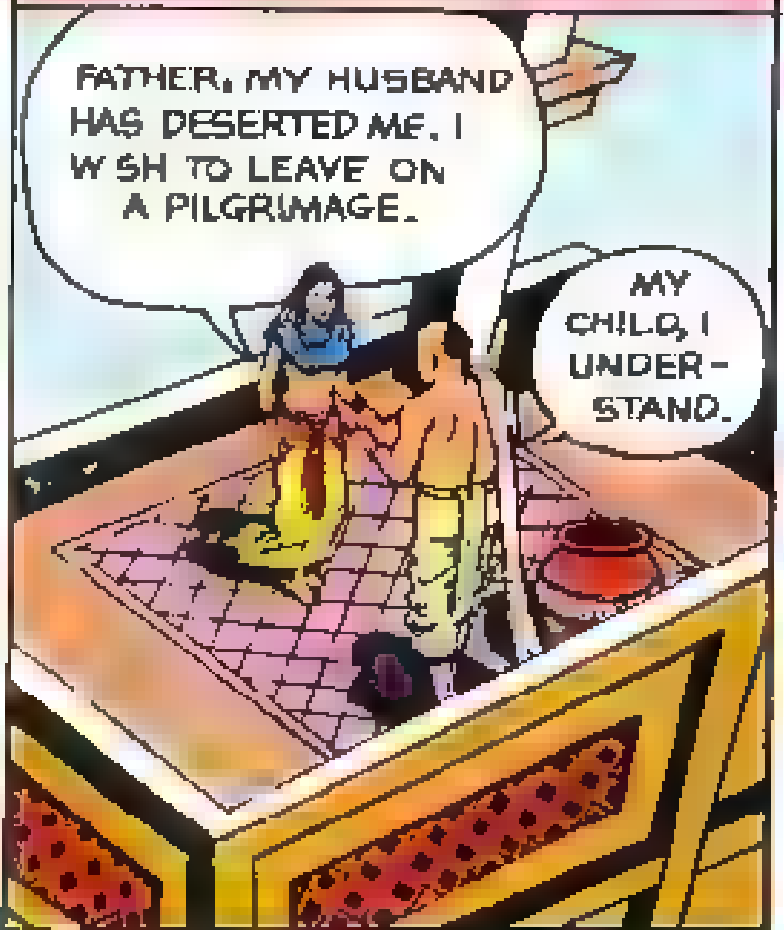
HIS NAME IS EN-
GRAVED ON THIS RING
THE RENOWNED MULA-
DEVA OF UJJAINI!
I WILL GO THERE
AND PROVE THAT
I WAS NOT JOKING
EITHER!



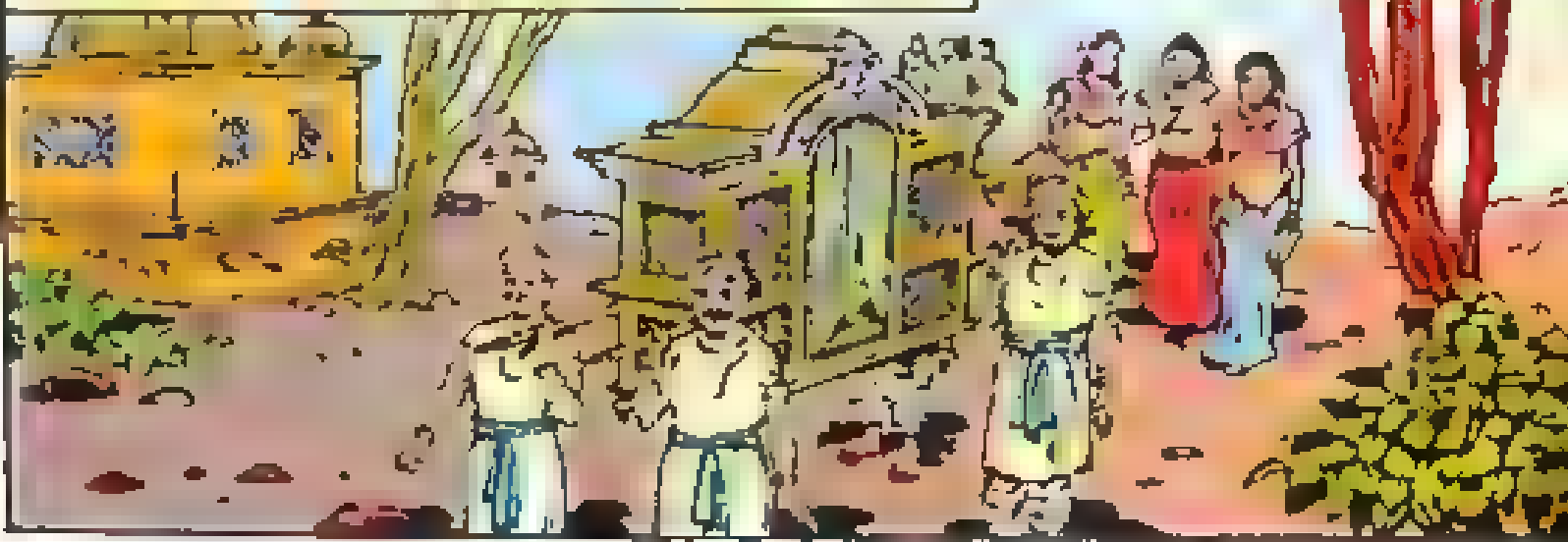
SHE WENT TO HER FATHER

FATHER, MY HUSBAND
HAS DESERTED ME. I
WISH TO LEAVE ON
A PILGRIMAGE.

MY
CHILD, I
UNDER-
STAND.



SHE TOOK PERMISSION FROM HER FATHER AND SET OUT FOR UJJAINI,
EQUIPPED WITH MONEY AND ATTENDANTS.



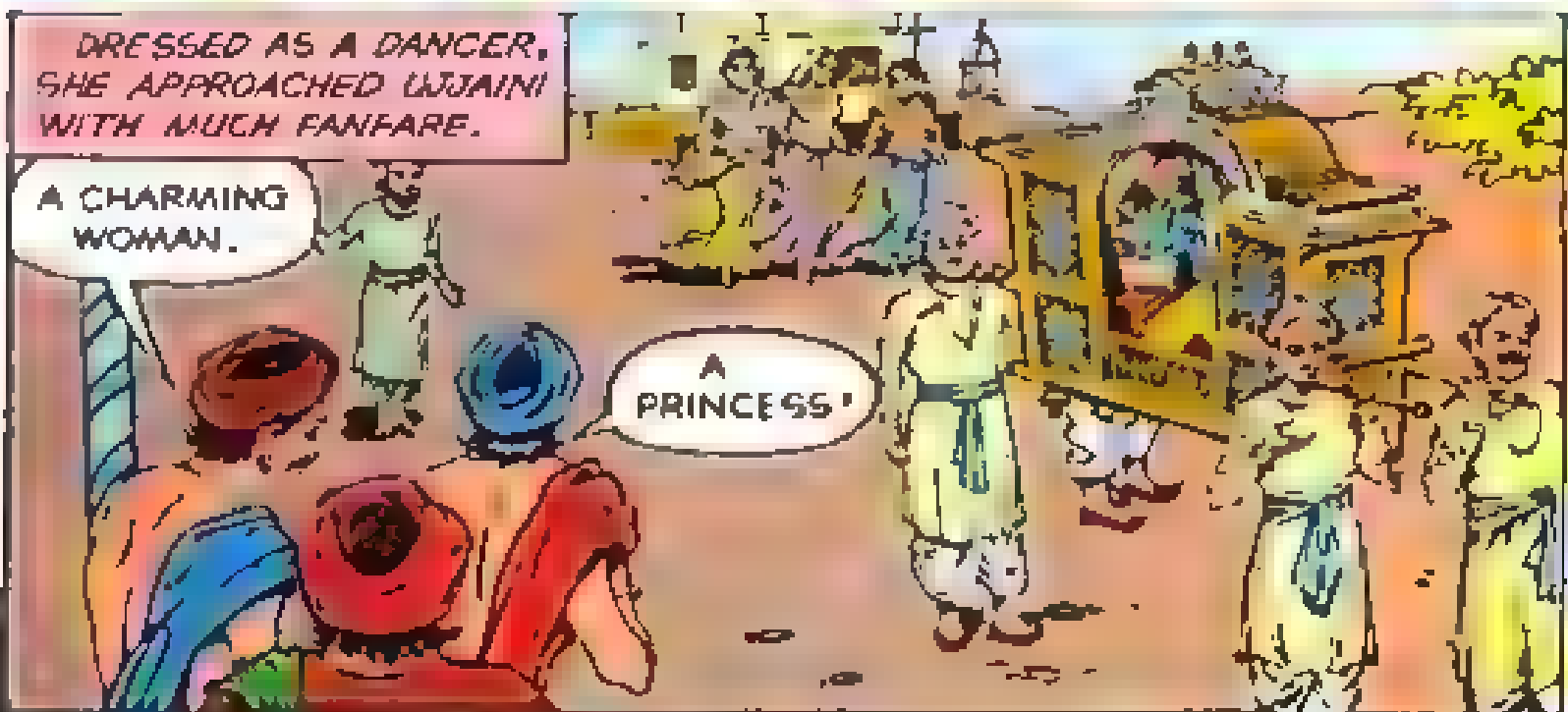
ON THE WAY SHE BOUGHT HERSELF A FINE COSTUME AND



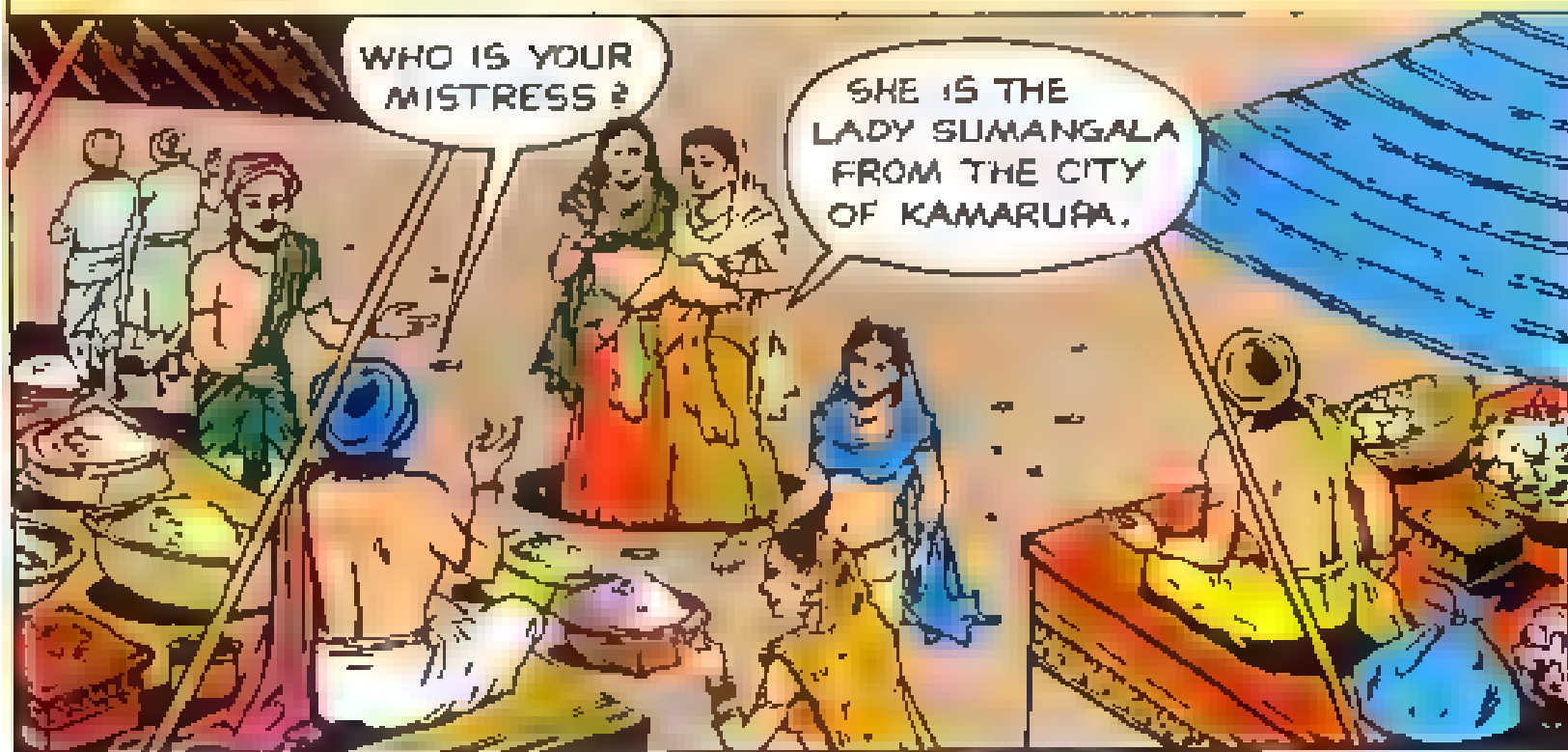
DRESSED AS A DANCER,
SHE APPROACHED UJJAINI
WITH MUCH FANFARE.

A CHARMING
WOMAN.

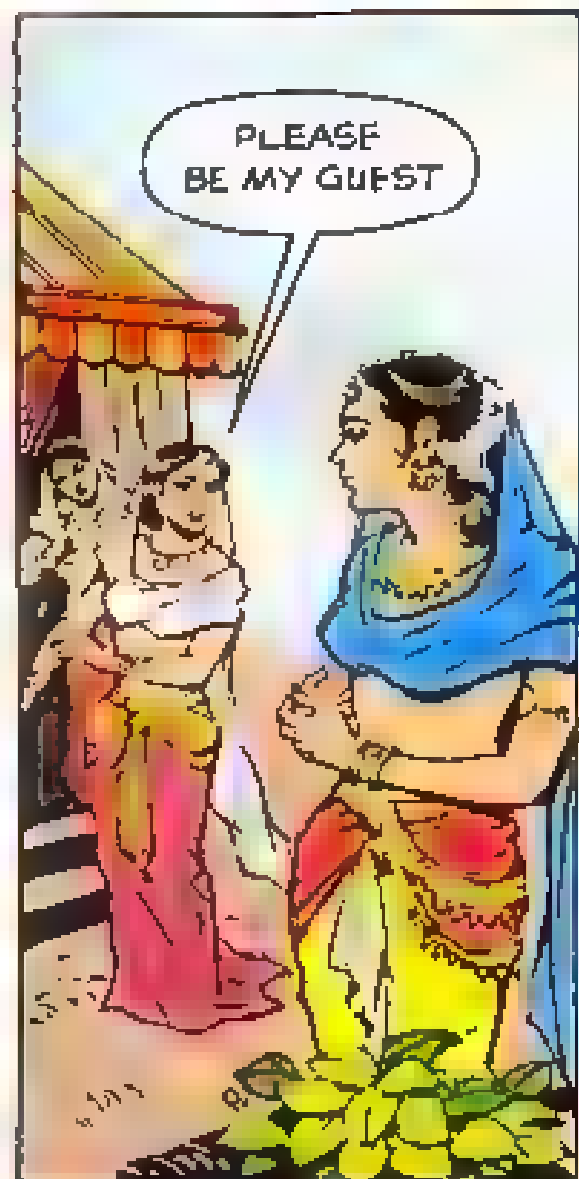
A
PRINCESS!



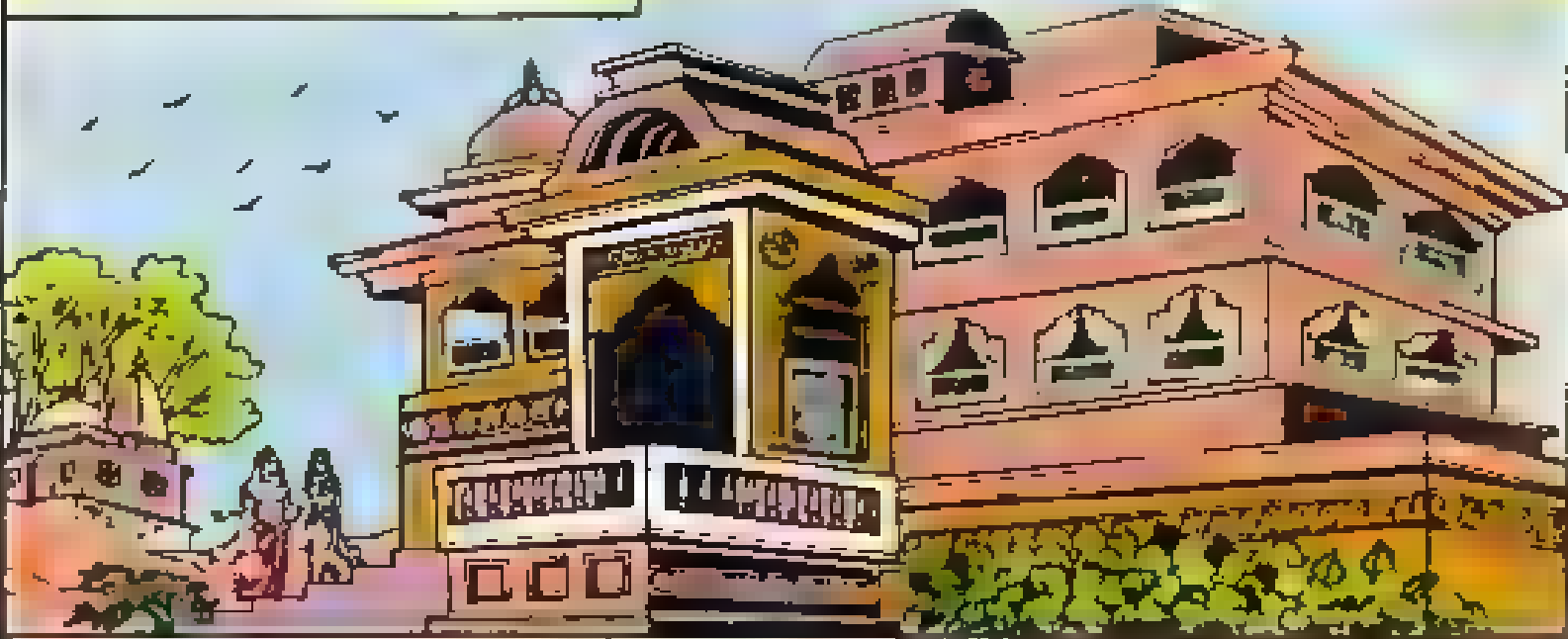
SHE CAMPED OUTSIDE THE CITY AND HER SERVANTS WENT ABOUT PROCLAIMING HER AS THE LOVELIEST WOMAN IN THE WORLD.



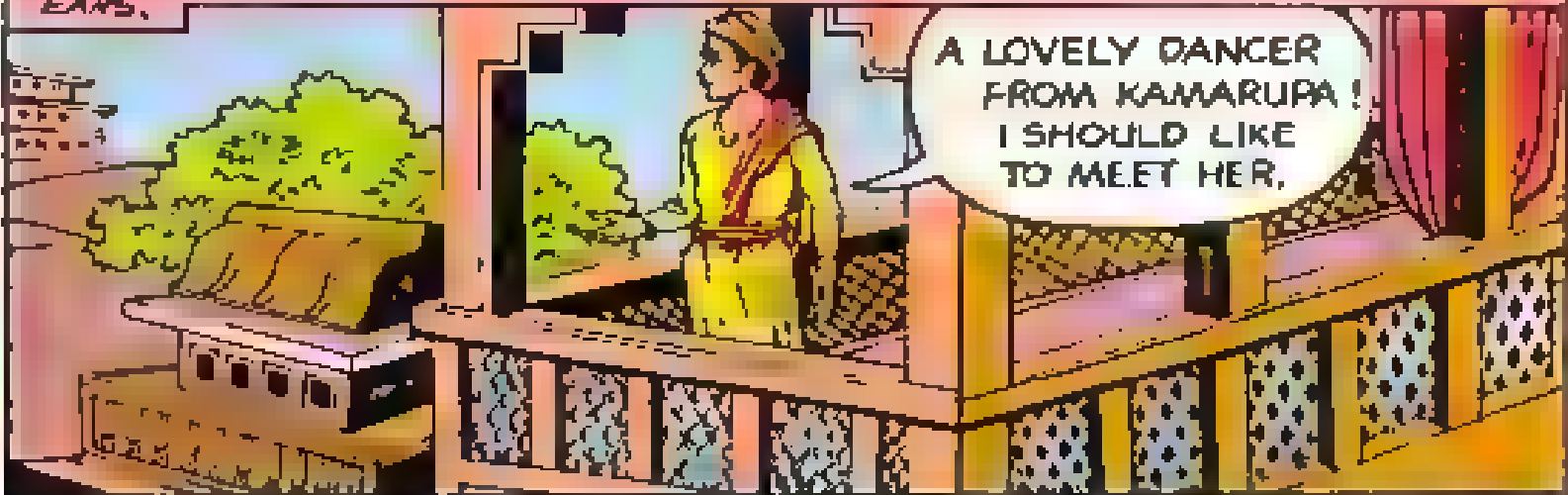
A DISTINGUISHED DANCER OF UJJAINI, NAMED DEVADATTA, APPROACHED SUMANGALA.



SUMANGALA ACCEPTED THE OFFER. DEVADATTA GAVE SUMANGALA HER OWN MANSION TO LIVE IN.

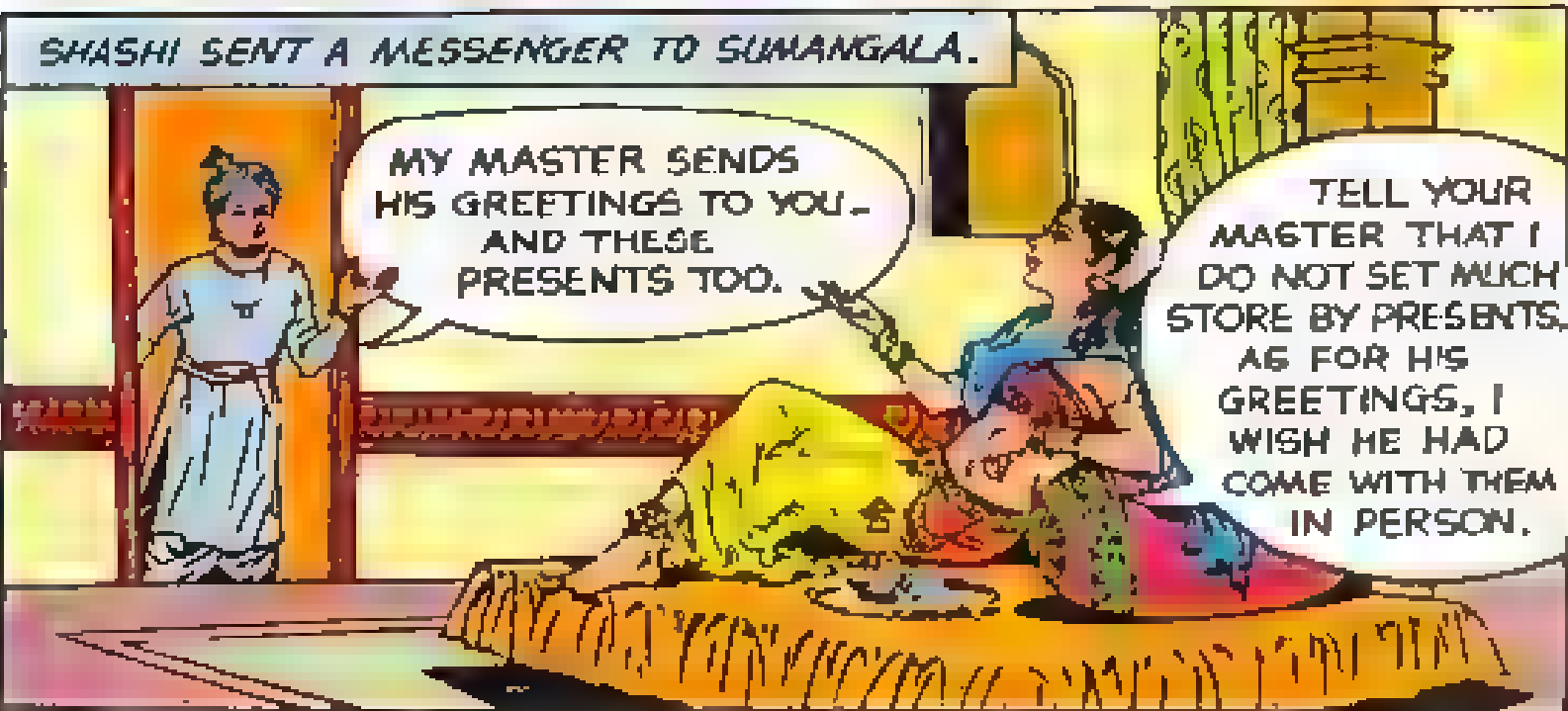


NEWS ABOUT SUMANGALA'S CHARM AND BEAUTY REACHED SHASHI'S EARS.



A LOVELY DANCER
FROM KAMARUPA!
I SHOULD LIKE
TO MEET HER.

SHASHI SENT A MESSENGER TO SUMANGALA.



MY MASTER SENDS
HIS GREETINGS TO YOU,
AND THESE
PRESENTS TOO.

TELL YOUR
MASTER THAT I
DO NOT SET MUCH
STORE BY PRESENTS.
AS FOR HIS
GREETINGS, I
WISH HE HAD
COME WITH THEM
IN PERSON.

THE MESSENGER RETURNED TO SHASHI.

I SHALL SEE
HER THIS
EVENING

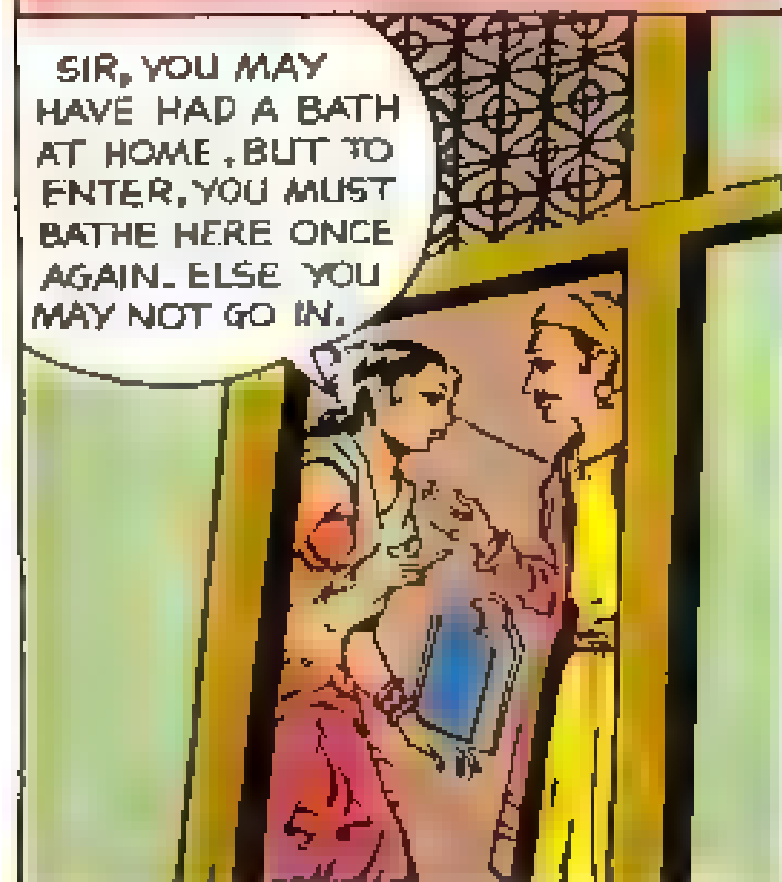


THAT NIGHT, SHASHI LEFT FOR HER PALACE, DRESSED IN FINE CLOTHES.

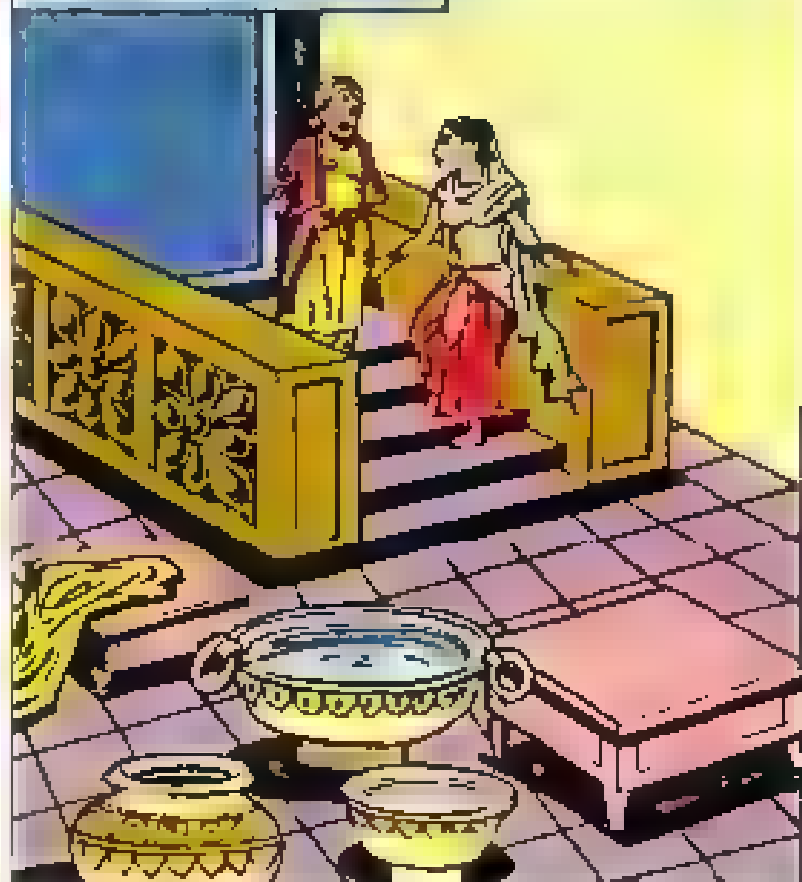


WHEN HE CAME TO THE FIRST
ENTRANCE OF THE PALACE, THE
DOORKEEPER STOPPED HIM.

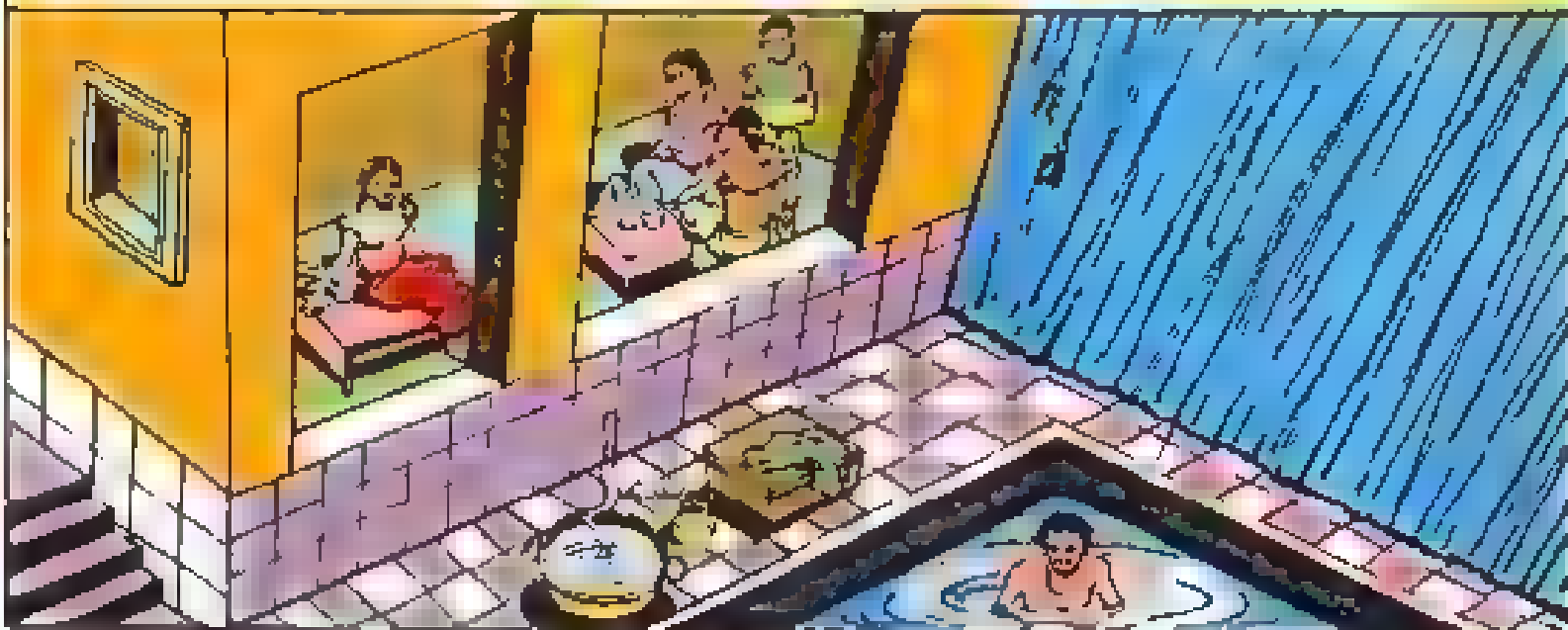
SIR, YOU MAY
HAVE HAD A BATH
AT HOME, BUT TO
ENTER, YOU MUST
BATHE HERE ONCE
AGAIN. ELSE YOU
MAY NOT GO IN.



THE SURPRISED SHASHI AGREED AND
WAS LED TO A TASTEFULLY
DECORATED BATH.

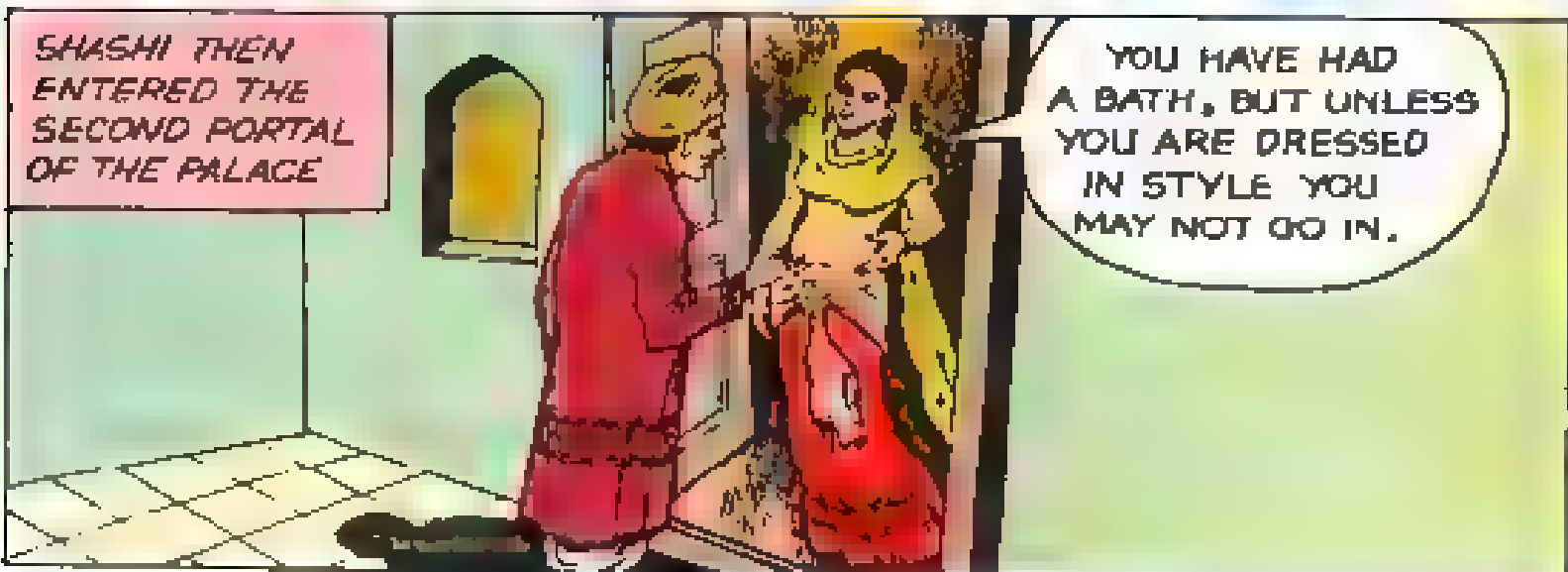


FEMALE SERVANTS WAITED UPON HIM AND BY THE TIME HE FINISHED BATHING, THE FIRST WATCH OF THE NIGHT HAD PASSED.

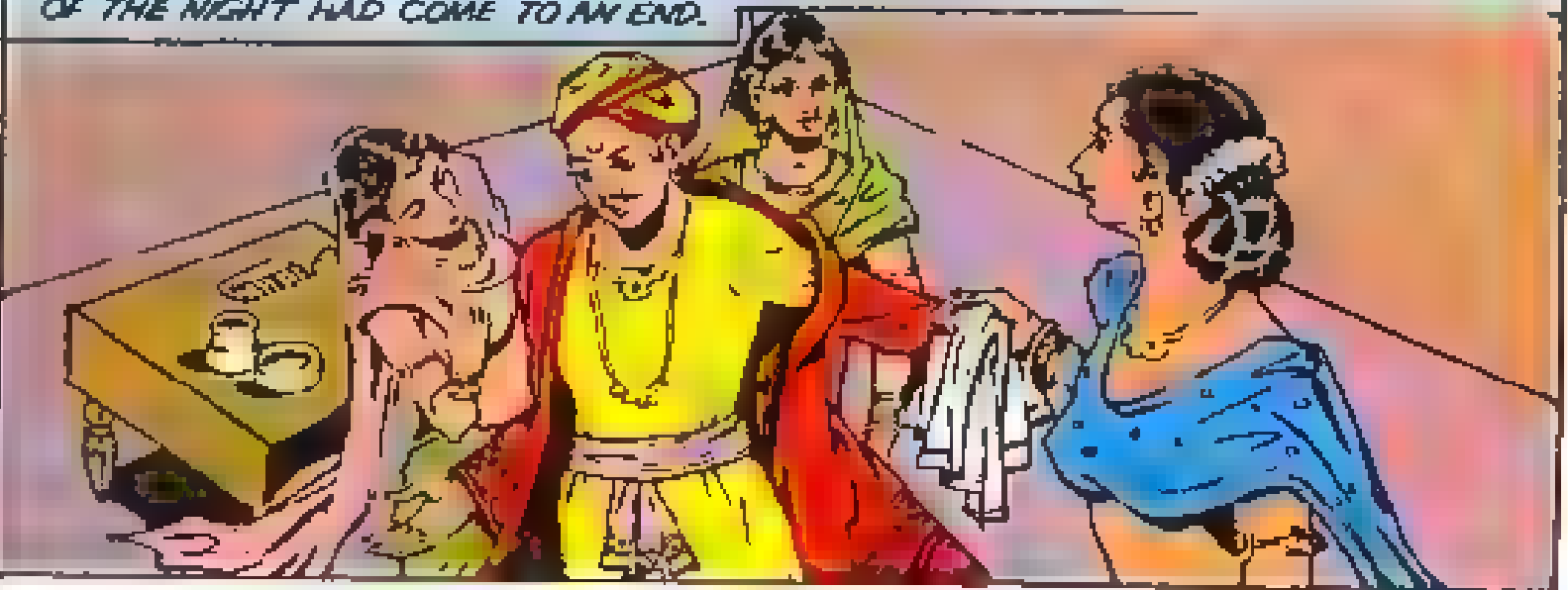


SHASHI THEN ENTERED THE SECOND PORTAL OF THE PALACE

YOU HAVE HAD A BATH, BUT UNLESS YOU ARE DRESSED IN STYLE YOU MAY NOT GO IN.



SHASHI TURNED BACK AND WAS SOON ADORNED IN BEAUTIFUL GARMENTS BY SUMANGALA'S FEMALE SERVANTS. BY THIS TIME THE SECOND WATCH OF THE NIGHT HAD COME TO AN END.



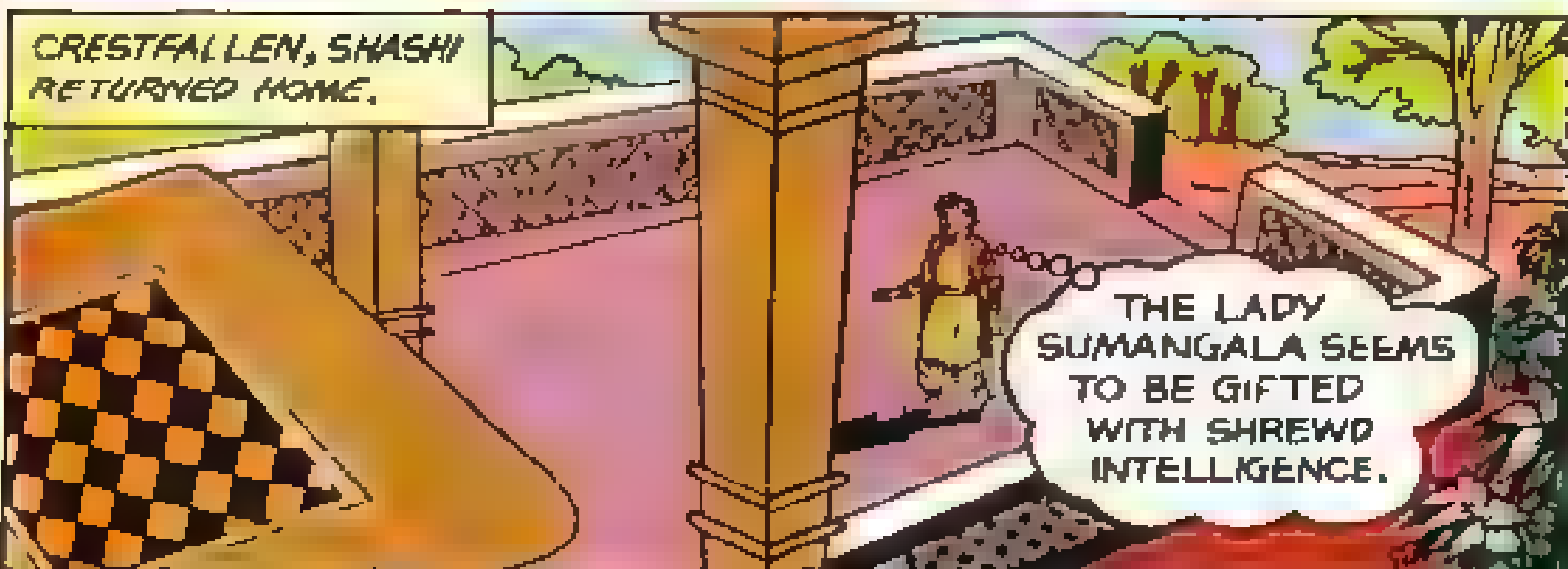
AT THE THIRD PORTAL HE WAS ASKED TO PARTAKE OF A DAINTY MEAL. THIS FURTHER DELAYED SHASHI, AND THE THIRD WATCH OF THE NIGHT HAD ALSO PASSED.



WHEN SHASHI ENTERED THE FOURTH AND FINAL DOOR THAT LED TO SUMANGALA'S PRIVATE APARTMENT, THE DOORKEEPER STOPPED HIM RUDELY.



CRESTFALLEN, SHASHI RETURNED HOME.

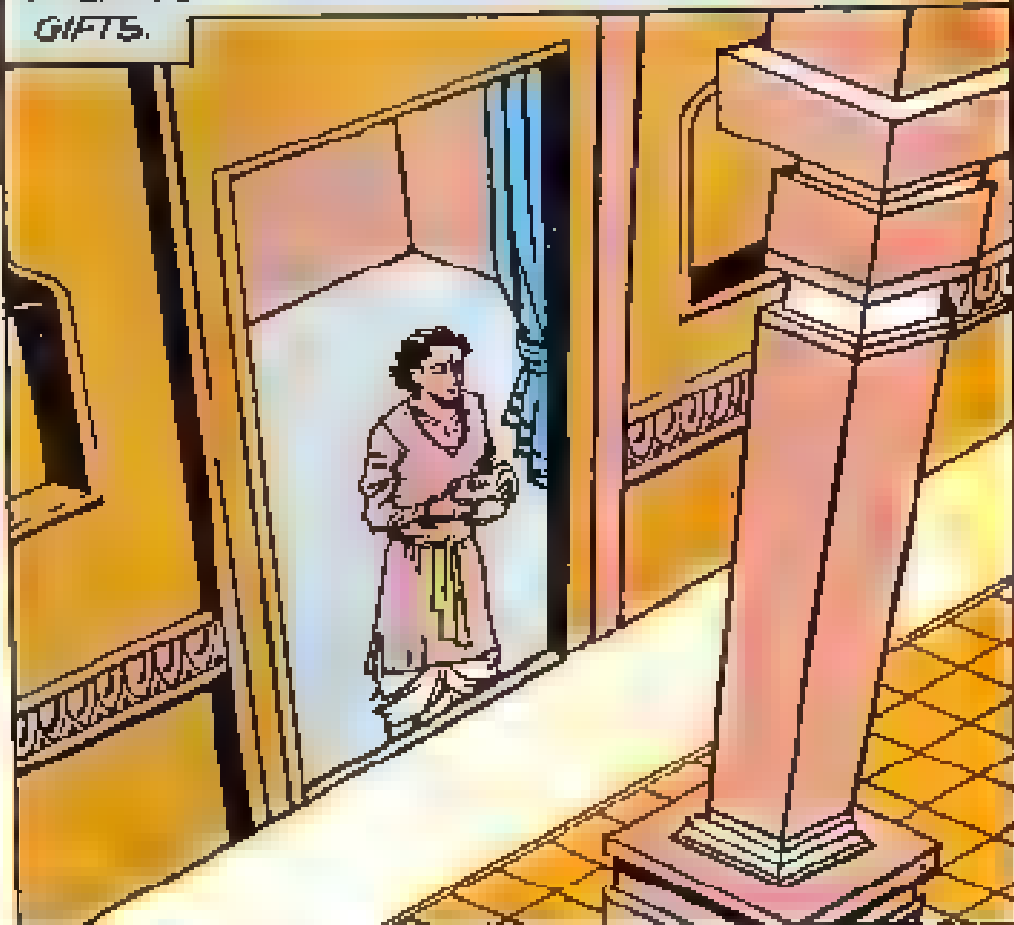


THE NEXT DAY SHASHI WENT TO MULADEVA AND RELATED THE INCIDENT.

OUTDONE BY A MERE DANCER! FRIEND, I SWEAR TO GET THE BETTER OF THIS WOMAN.



THAT NIGHT MULADEVA WENT TO SUMANGALA'S PALACE, CARRYING A NUMBER OF PRECIOUS GIFTS.

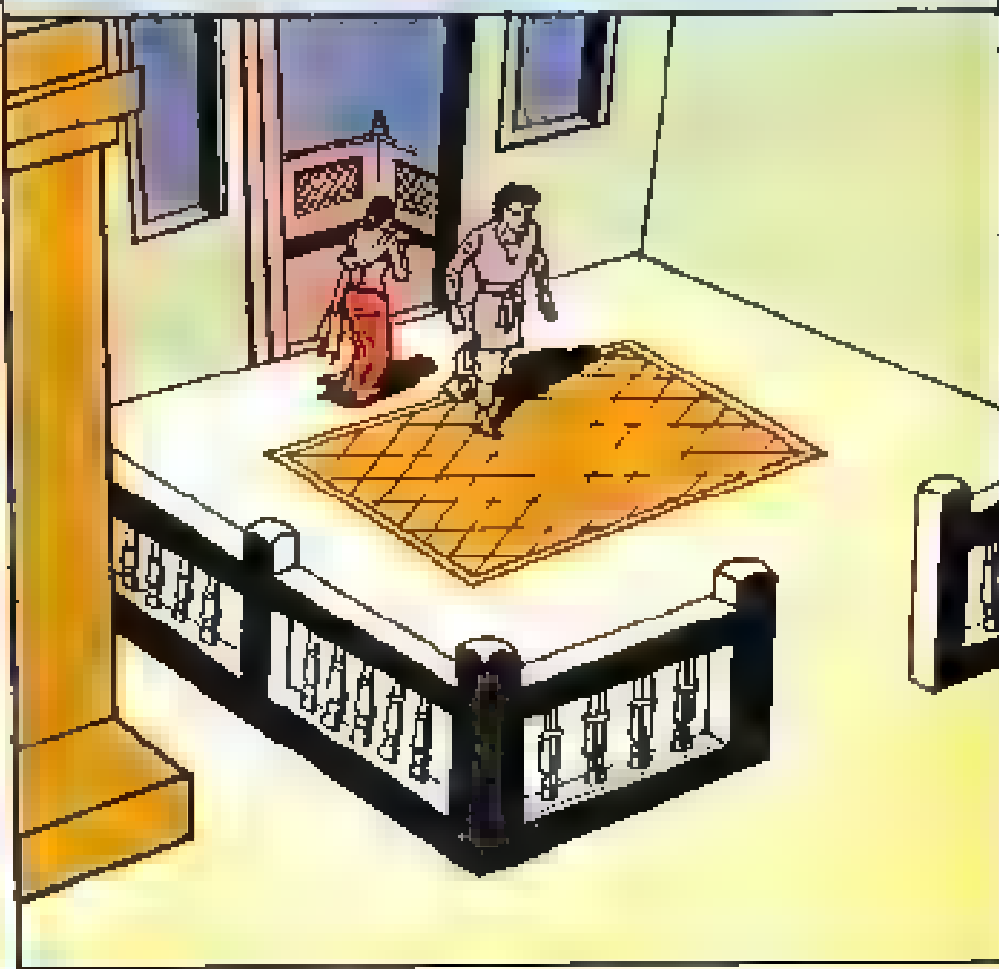


WHEN HE WAS STOPPED AT THE FIRST DOOR, HE BRIBED THE DOORKEEPER WITH A VALUABLE PIECE OF JEWELLERY.

A CASKET OF GOLD STUDED WITH PEARLS, ALL FOR YOU.



HE WAS SOON PERMITTED TO PASS THE DOOR.



IN THE SAME WAY HE GAINED ADMITTANCE
THROUGH THE OTHER DOORS.



AT SUMANGALA'S DOOR HE GAVE THE DOORKEEPER A NECKLACE
MADE OF BRILLIANT DIAMONDS.

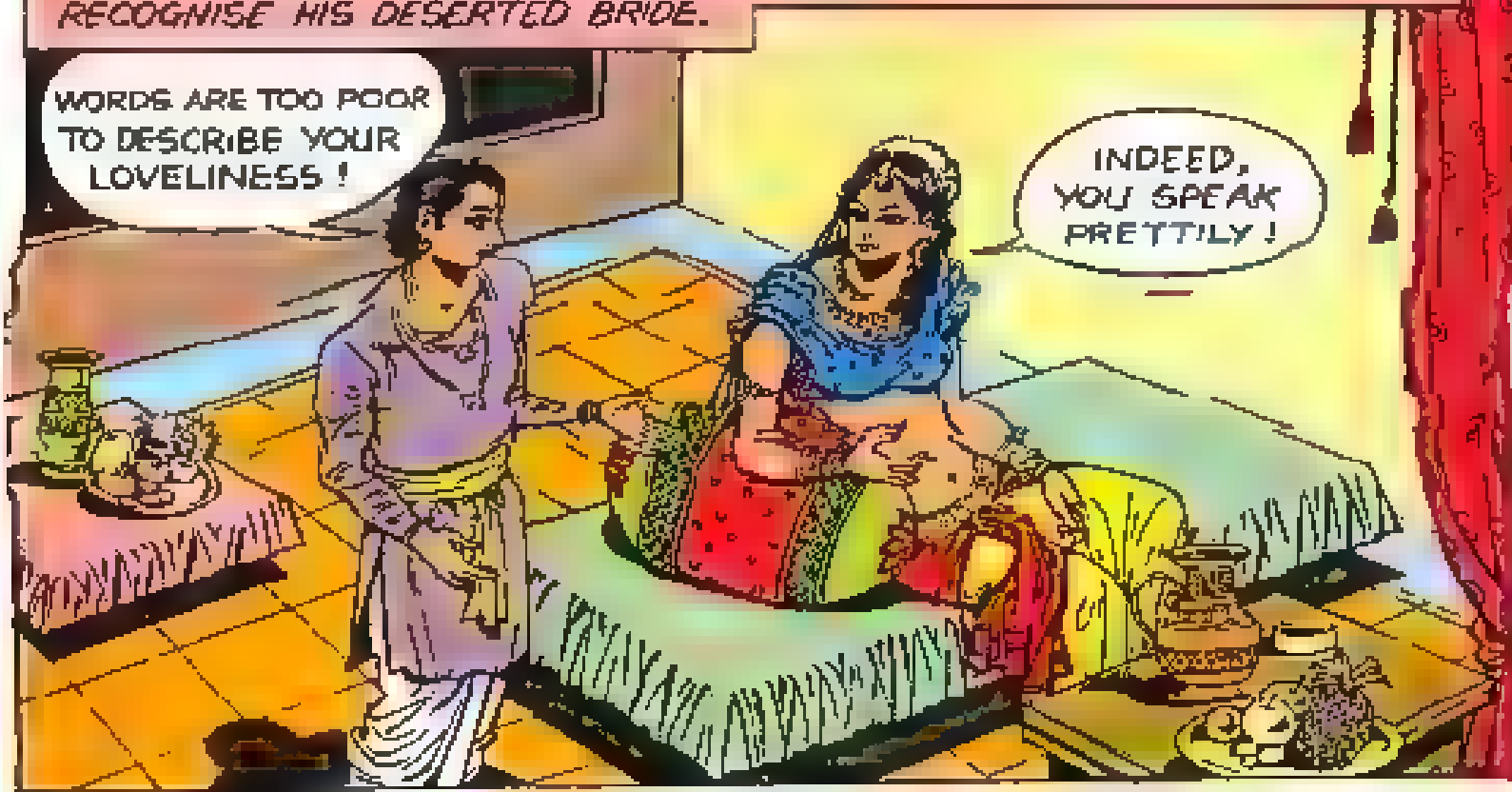
GIVE YOUR
MISTRESS THIS AND
SAY THAT MULADEVA
WAITS UPON HER.



MULADEVA WAS SOON IN THE PRESENCE OF SUMANGALA. HE DID NOT
RECOGNISE HIS DESERTED BRIDE.

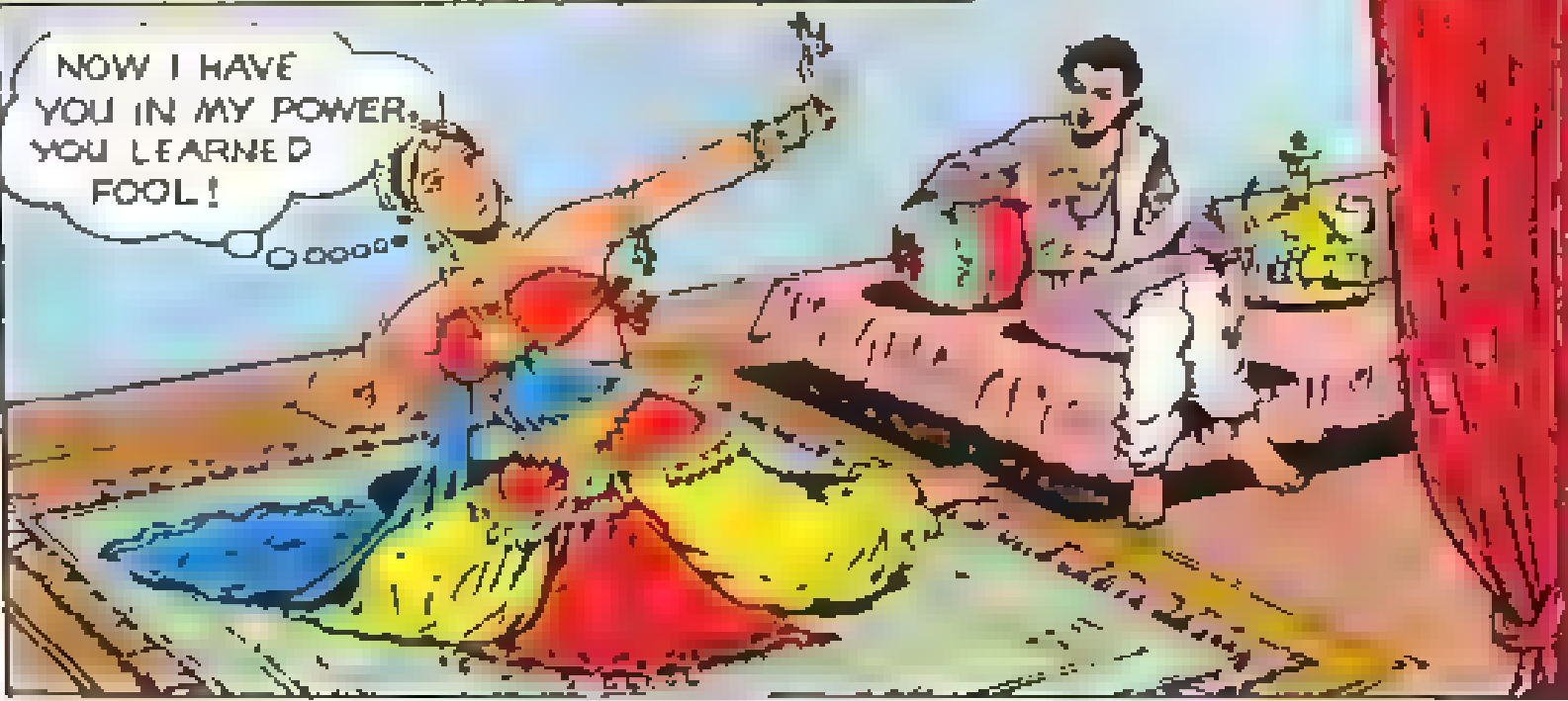
WORDS ARE TOO POOR
TO DESCRIBE YOUR
LOVELINESS !

INDEED,
YOU SPEAK
PRETTYLY !



SUMANGALA ENTERTAINED HIM ROYALLY.

NOW I HAVE
YOU IN MY POWER,
YOU LEARNED
FOOL!

A woman in a colorful sari (red, yellow, blue) is dancing on a patterned rug. A man in a white dhoti and shawl sits on a raised platform in the background, watching her. A red curtain is on the right.

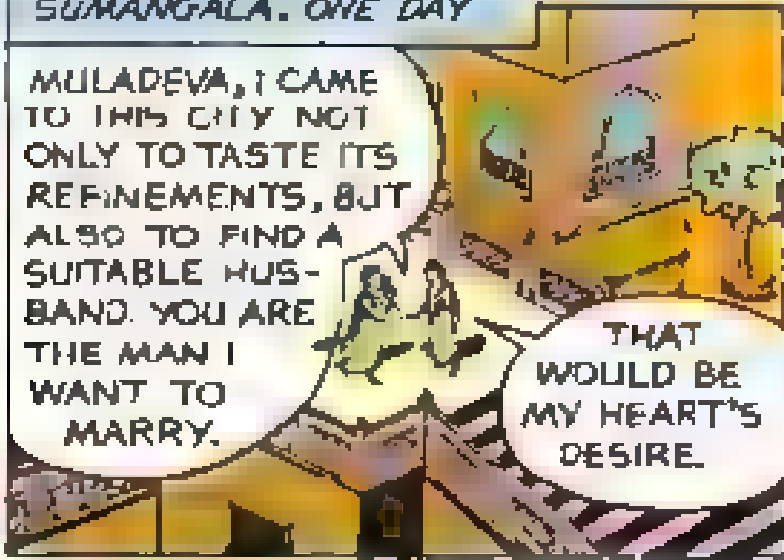
YOU DANCE
EXCEEDINGLY WELL.
AND AS FOR YOUR
HOSPITALITY

LEARNED S.R,
DO NOT OUR
SCRIPTURES
SAY THAT A GUEST
IS DIVINITY
ITSELF ? DO
COME AGAIN

MULADEVA PAID REGULAR VISITS TO
SUMANGALA. ONE DAY


MULADEVA, I CAME
TO THIS CITY NOT
ONLY TO TASTE ITS
REFINEMENTS, BUT
ALSO TO FIND A
SUITABLE HUSBAND. YOU ARE
THE MAN I
WANT TO
MARRY.

THAT
WOULD BE
MY HEART'S
DESIRE.

A man and a woman are sitting on a bench in a garden. There are trees and a building in the background.

SUMANGALA AND MULADEVA
WERE MARRIED AND HE
LIVED AT HER MANSION.
AFTER A FEW DAYS -

NOW I MUST
RETURN TO
PATALIPUTRA

A woman in a colorful sari is standing and talking to a man who is lying in a bed. The room has a red curtain and a window with a view of a garden.

THE NEXT DAY..

I HAVE RECEIVED A LETTER FROM MY KING ORDERING ME TO RETURN IMMEDIATELY!

AND WHAT IS YOUR REPLY?

I MUST OBEY MY KING'S COMMAND. BUT WE WILL MEET SOON.

AND SUMANGALA LEFT AWAINI

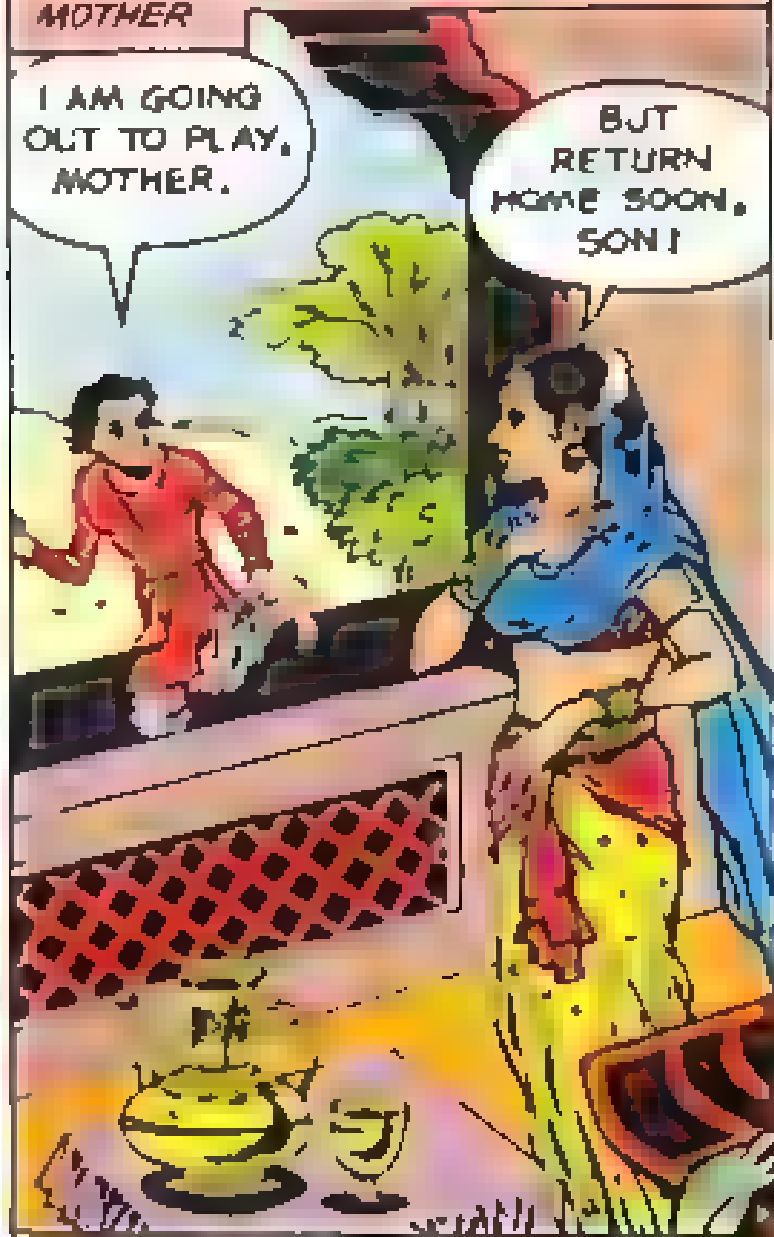
SHE'S GONE - AND I AM BROKEN-HEARTED!

IN DUE COURSE SUMANGALA GAVE BIRTH TO A SON.

TWELVE YEARS PASSED BY THE BOY GREW UP INSTRUCTED IN MANY AN ACCOMPLISHMENT BY HIS MOTHER

I AM GOING OUT TO PLAY, MOTHER.

BUT RETURN HOME SOON, SON!



WHILE AT PLAY, SUMANGALA'S SON HAD A FIGHT WITH THE OTHER BOYS



WEAKLINGS! CHILDREN OF WEAKLINGS!

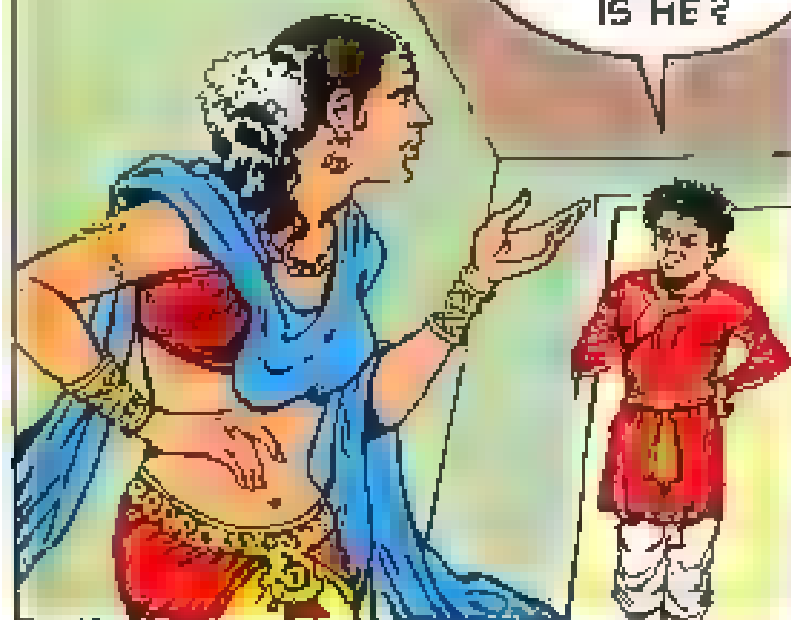
YES, YES, SON OF A STRONG FATHER. BUT DO YOU KNOW WHO YOUR FATHER IS?



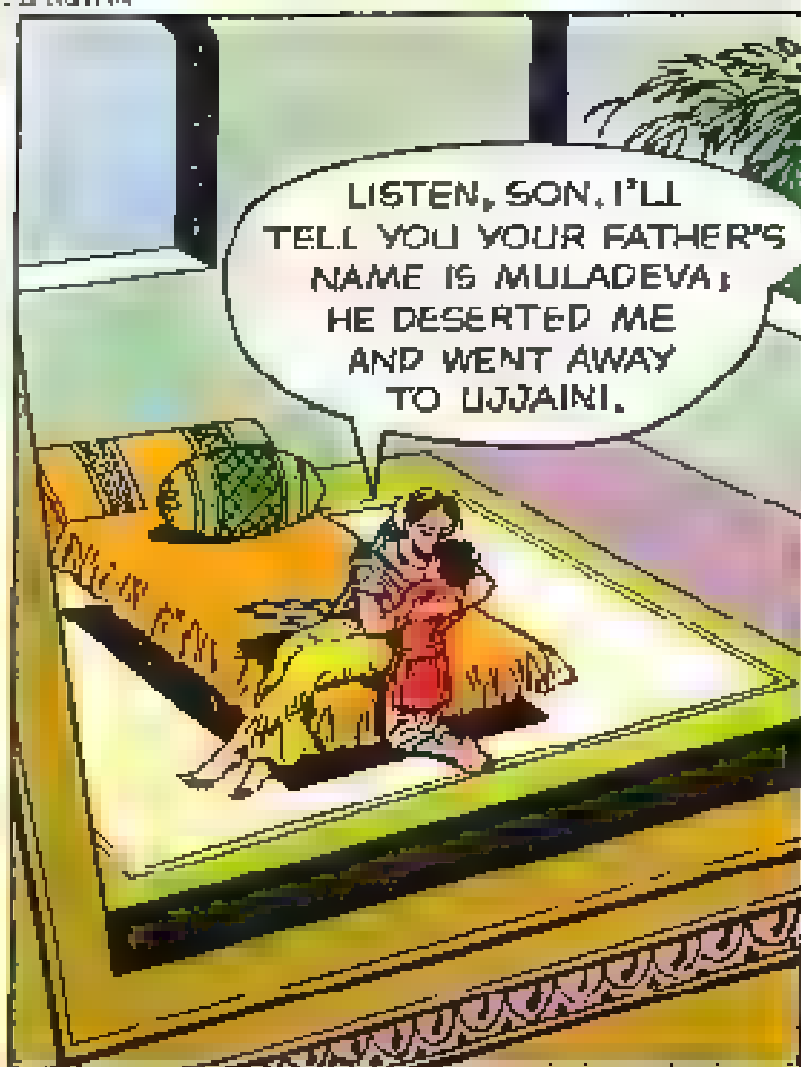
THAT DAY, THE BOY CAME HOME QUITE UPSET

DID YOU FIGHT AGAIN?

MOTHER, WHO IS MY FATHER? AND WHERE IS HE?



LISTEN, SON, I'LL TELL YOU YOUR FATHER'S NAME IS MULADEVA; HE DESERTED ME AND WENT AWAY TO UJJAINI.

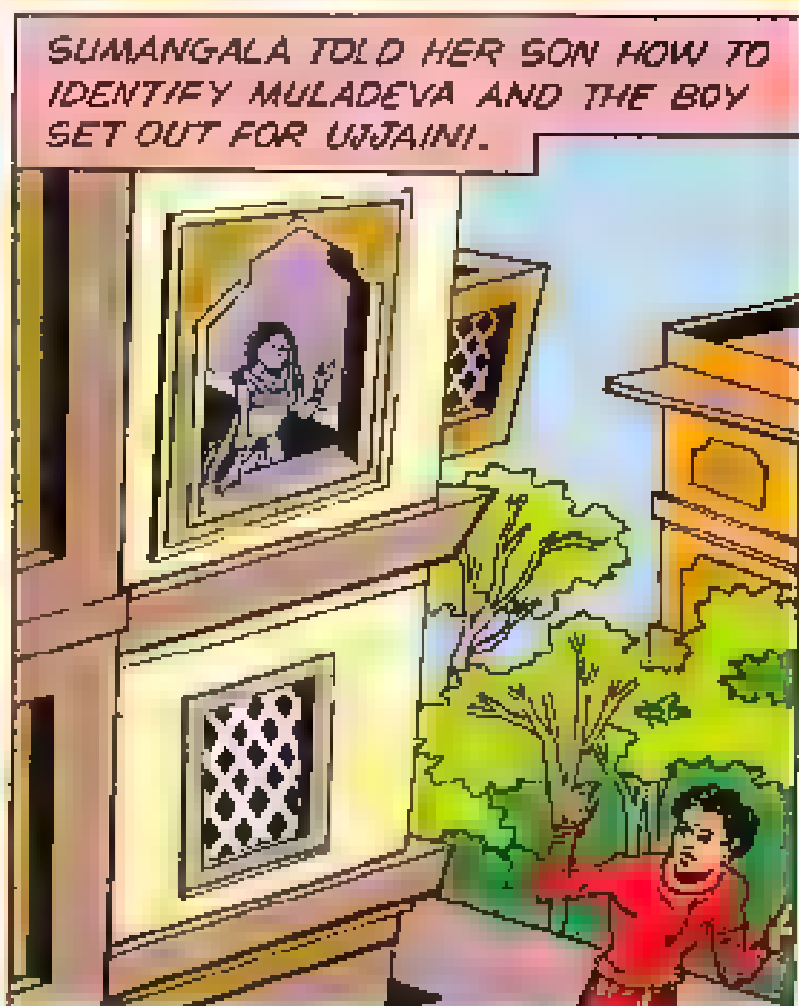


SHE TOLD HIM HER TALE.

I WILL BRING BACK MY FATHER, A CAPTIVE.



SUMANGALA TOLD HER SON HOW TO IDENTIFY MULADEVA AND THE BOY SET OUT FOR UJJAINI.



HE REACHED UJJAINI AND WANDERED ABOUT TILL HE CAME TO A GAMBLING DEN.

DID YOU SEE MULADEVA? I HAVE WORK WITH HIM.

YES, HE JUST WENT IN.

ON HEARING MULADEVA'S NAME -

MULADEVA? THAT COULD BE MY FATHER! I'LL FOLLOW THAT MAN.

THE BOY ENTERED THE HALL AND SAW THE MAN HE HAD FOLLOWED SITTING WITH TWO PEOPLE, PLAYING DICE.

I'LL JOIN THEM AND SHOW THEM WHAT MY FINGERS CAN DO AT DICE!

HE JOINED THE OTHERS IN A GAME

FOR YOUR AGE, YOU PLAY WELL, BOY!

IN NO TIME, THE BOY WON MONEY FROM EVERYONE.

YOU PLAY EXCEEDINGLY WELL! YOU PLAY LIKE A MAN!

THIS IS SMALL SPORT, S.R I AM ADEPT IN MANY OTHER MATTERS!

THE BOY LEFT, GIVING AWAY THE MONEY TO THE BEGGARS SQUATTING OUTSIDE.

PRINCELY GENEROSITY TOO!

THAT NIGHT WHILE MULADEVA LAY ASLEEP...

..THE BOY ENTERED HIS CHAMBER STEALTHILY.

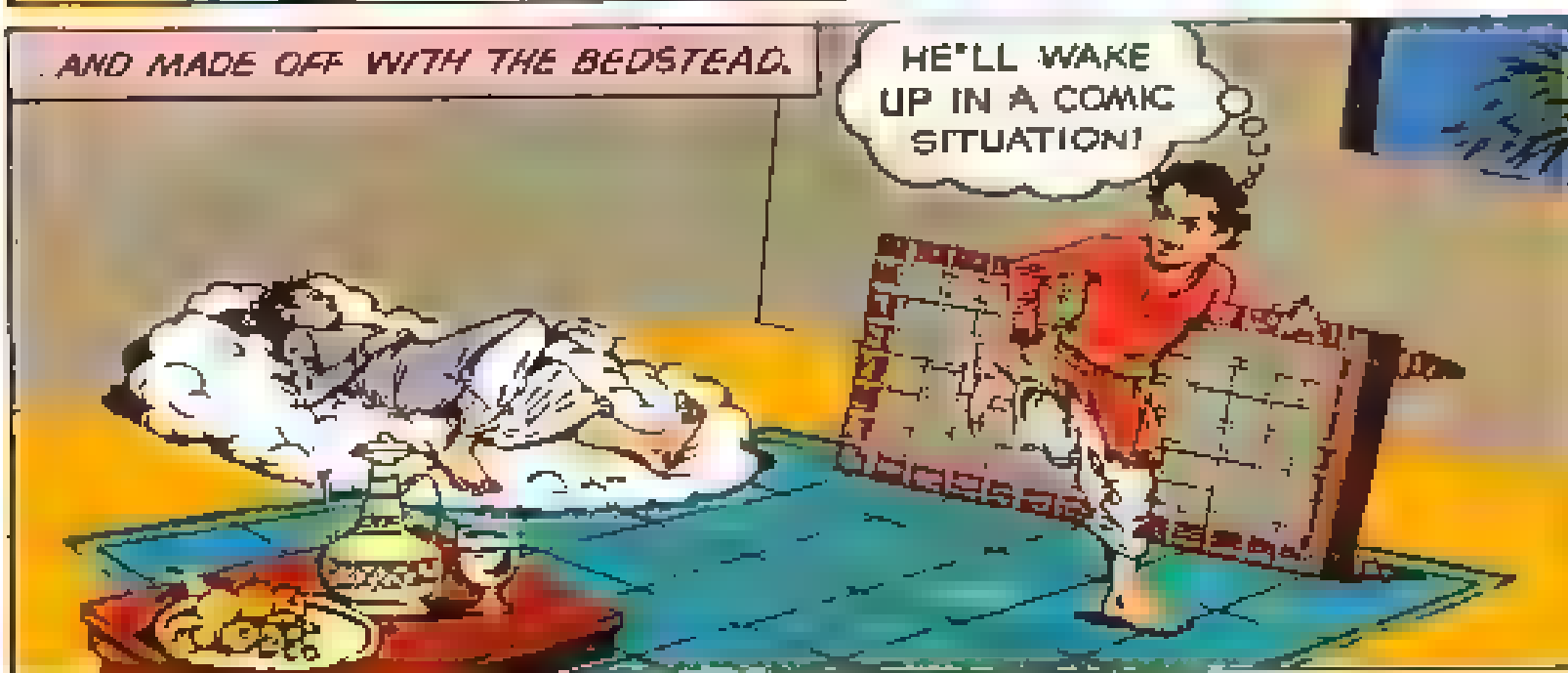
I MUST GENTLY PLACE HIM ON THE FLOOR AND CARRY OFF THE BEDSTEAD!

HE ARTFULLY PUT MULADEVA ON A HEAP OF SOFT COTTON.



AND MADE OFF WITH THE BEDSTEAD.

HE'LL WAKE UP IN A COMIC SITUATION!



THE NEXT MORNING, MULADEVA AWOKED WITH MIXED FEELINGS OF SHOCK, AMUSEMENT AND SHAME.

SOMEBODY PULLS OFF MY BED FROM UNDERNEATH ME WHILE I REMAIN DEAD ASLEEP...?



THAT DAY, AS HE WAS PASSING THROUGH THE MARKET SQUARE, MULADEVA SAW THE BOY.

THAT IS THE VERY BOY WHO WON AT THE DICE GAME! NOW HE IS SELLING MY BED!

MULADEVA APPROACHED HIM.

WHAT IS THE PRICE OF THIS BEDSTEAD?

I WILL EXCHANGE IT FOR A STRANGE AND WONDERFUL TALE.

WELL, THEN, IF YOU CAN UNDERSTAND MY TALE AND SEE ITS TRUTH, THE BEDSTEAD IS YOURS. IF NOT, I KEEP IT.

THAT'S A BARGAIN!

MULADEVA SPUN HIS TALE.

FAMINE STALKED THE LAND. THE KING COVERED THE BOAR'S BELOVED WITH SHOWERS OF SPRAY FROM CHARIOTS OF SNAKES. WITH THE GRAIN THIS PRODUCED, THE KING PUT AN END TO THE FAMINE.

THE BOY SMILED KNOWINGLY.

THE CHARIOTS OF
SNAKES ARE CLOUDS, THE
BELOVED OF THE BOAR IS
THE EARTH, FOR SHE WAS
MOST DEAR TO THE GOD
VISHNU IN HIS BOAR INCAR-
NATION, SO ALL YOU ARE
SAYING IS THAT THE RAIN
FROM THE CLOUDS MADE
GRAN SPRING UP
ON THE EARTH!

MULADEVA WAS DUMBFOUNDED AT
THE YOUNG BOY'S QUICK GRASP
OF FACTS

NOW HERE'S A STRANGE
TALE. IF YOU UNDERSTAND IT
AND SEE ITS TRUTH, THE BED-
STEAD IS YOURS. ELSE, YOU
SHALL BE MY SERVANT

I AGREE

LONG AGO ON THIS EARTH
WAS BORN A WONDERFUL BOY
AS SOON AS HE WAS BORN
HE MADE THE EARTH
TREMBLE WITH HIS WEIGHT.
WHEN HE GREW BIGGER
HE STEPPED INTO
ANOTHER WORLD!

MULADEVA COULD NOT FATHOM THE
RIDDLE.

A FALSE
STORY,
INDEED.

O LEARNED IN THE
SCRIPTURES, DID NOT
THE GOD VISHNU, WHEN
HE TOOK BIRTH AS A
DWARF, MAKE THE EARTH
TREMBLE, THEN GROW
BIGGER AND STEP
INTO HEAVEN?

MULADEVA FELT HUMBLER.

SIR, YOU HAVE
BEEN DEFEATED
BY ME. OWN UP AND
BE MY SERVANT,
ACCOMPANYING ME
WHEREVER I GO.

BOUND BY HIS PROMISE, MULADEVA
FOLLOWED HIM AND SOON FOUND
HIMSELF IN PATALIPUTRA

THE BOY LED MULADEVA STRAIGHT TO HIS MOTHER

WHAT!
SUMANGALA?

YES, BUT ALSO
YOUR DESERTED WIFE
TODAY AS I HAD VOWED,
YOU HAVE BEEN
BROUGHT HERE BY
OUR SON

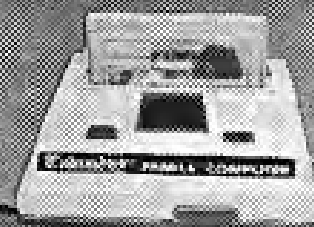
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DESIGN



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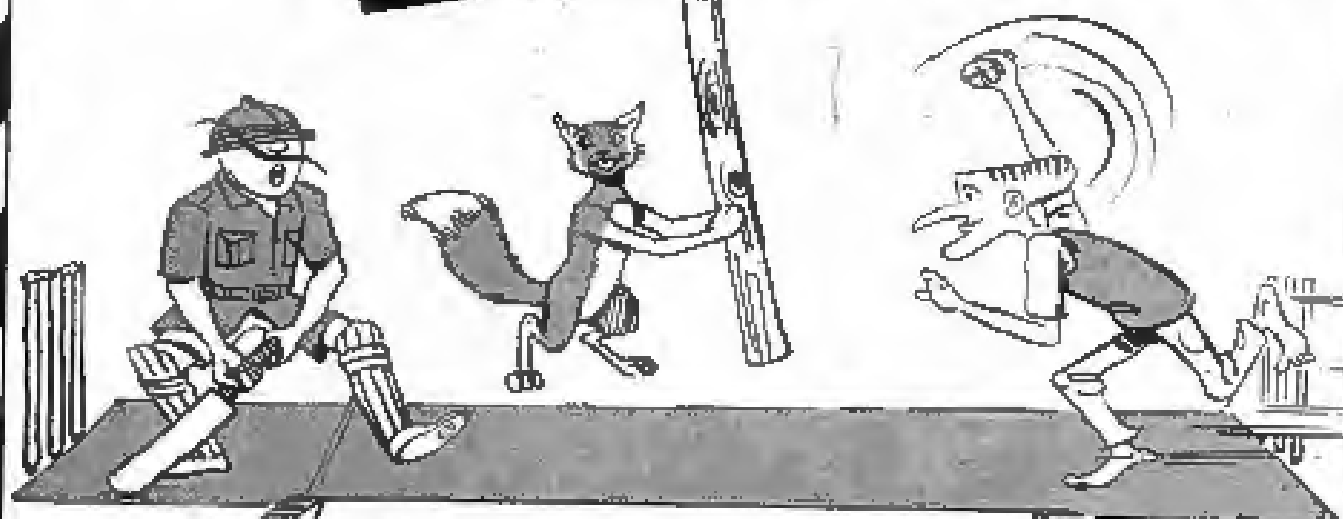
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